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AUTHOR Willman, Frederick
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ABSTRACT

Over a four-year period from 1971 to 1975, the Oakland (California) School District, with the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, made a concerted effort to bring parents, students, organized community interest groups, religious and service organizations, and school staff members into a decision-sharing relationship. The Master Plan Citizens Committee was established to investigate a broad set of issues in the areas of curriculum and instruction, finance, multicultural education, management and administration, buildings and maintenance, and community relations. This publication is a social history of Oakland's Master Plan Citizens Committee. It approaches the committee's work from the perspective of the participants and examines what the experience has meant to them and what they feel the Master Plan effort has meant to the Oakland schools. (Author/JG)

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WORKING PAPERS

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

A REPORT ON THE MASTER PLAN OF THE OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

EA 009 087

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PUBLICATION DATE NOVEMBER 1975

APR 16 1970

The community participation programs of the Rockefeller Foundation were devised, and are supervised, by Dr. Charles H. Smith (center), Associate Director for Social Sciences, with the assistance of Portia Slappey and Bruce Williams.

Developing a Sense of Community

A Report on the Master Plan of the Oakland Unified School District

Text by Frederick Willman

Pictures by Frederick Eberstadt

November 1975

The Rockefeller Foundation

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PREFACE

In the early 19th century, when Americans were largely a rural people, the village school, controlled by parents, was the center of social life. Young people received an unprofessional, pragmatic education. When village self-sufficiency gave way to urban specialization, systematization - modeled on the much admired mass-production factory - supplanted the more modest approach.

David Tyack, professor of education and history at Stanford University, describes contemporary observers' enthusiasm for "systematic behavior...a thousand little forms erect in their seats as though they were riveted there by some process of mechanism...murmurs and utterances of the class as nearly simultaneous and similar as they can be."*

This professional ideal of order and conformity received a rude challenge from the great waves of German and Irish immigrants who put new pressures on school systems considered unresponsive to immigrant needs and values. Immigrant politicians gradually seized control of city schools (and teacher patronage) from professional educators. But this form of community control alienated much of the cities' upper-class leadership and eventually led to the so-called school wars - the efforts by those whom Tyack calls "administrative progressives" to get the schools out of politics.

By the 1920's the reformers had won, but often at the expense of suppressing "differences of value and power in a heterogeneous city," and of leaving more and more people "bewildered about how to influence the behemoth that had promised accountability."

*David Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education (Harvard University Press), reviewed in the Carnegie Quarterly, Fall 1974.

Throughout this century, criticism has particularly focused on what Tyack calls the schools serving "as gatekeepers of opportunity" - the inability or unwillingness of the professional bureaucracy to prepare immigrant, poor, or minority children for anything but a subservient life. With a largely minority-group enrollment in our urban school systems today, it is small wonder that community involvement in school decision-making is one of the important considerations of our times.

Over the past decade, as schools have become the focus of controversy and confrontation, the concept of what it means to be "involved" has changed. Communities, now less willing to empower officials with total authority to do as they see fit, increasingly expect direct consultation and participation of those who will be affected by official decisions. But many school boards and administrators view this as a threat to the system's smooth operation. As an extreme example, they point to New York City's community control experiment of the late 1960's, considered by many a Pandora's box that should never have been opened. But relationships between professionals and clients are changing in many fields, and the schools cannot claim immunity nor remain aloof from those they serve.

In 1970 the Oakland, California public schools embarked on a program of educational reform that not only legitimized this shifting balance of power but recognized it to be a potential source of strength. Like many other inner cities, Oakland had changed rapidly during the 1960's. So had the schools. Enrollment became largely nonwhite. Student achievement on standardized tests declined. Education costs spiraled; resources to meet the changing needs lagged far behind. Facilities were old and poorly maintained. It was an all-too-familiar pattern.

Then, in 1970, the late Dr. Marcus Foster came to Oakland with a mandate to "open up the system." He felt that to restore confidence in the schools the community must be directly involved in addressing the massive, seemingly overwhelming problem of educating young people to cope with a changing world.

With this in mind, the Oakland School Board, the administration, and the community - all those concerned with the future of the schools - cautiously began to build a new set of relationships. In a city as diverse as Oakland, involvement invariably means different things to different people. The schools sought to shape opportunities for participation, to articulate and meet these

needs. The creation of a Master Plan Citizens Committee was central to that strategy.

Over a four-year period, with the assistance of The Rockefeller Foundation, the School District made a concerted effort to bring parents, students, organized community interest groups, and civic, religious, and service organizations, as well as school staff, into a decision-sharing relationship. The Master Plan Citizens Committee was established to investigate a broad set of issues in the areas of curriculum and instruction, finance, multicultural education, management and administration, buildings and maintenance, and community relations.

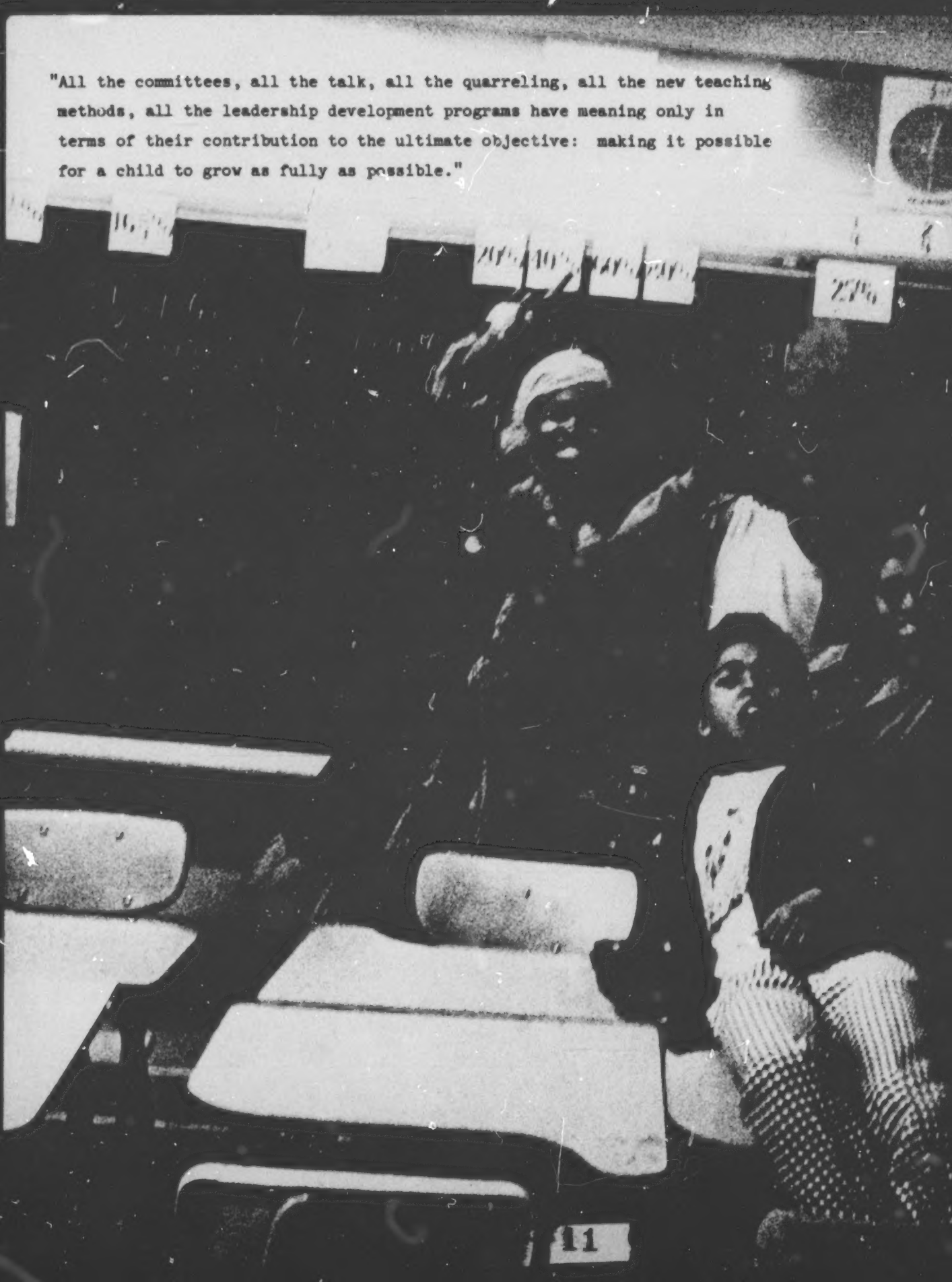
In some ways the process itself was as important as the products. As people from different backgrounds, representing different constituencies began to work together, they found that their interests were not always as disparate as they had thought. As they began to agree on major policy and program initiatives, and as the board and the administration adopted their proposals, attitudes toward the system began to change.

Perhaps nothing is more indicative of the change that has taken place than the fact that in 1973 a 44 million dollar bond issue, which resulted from recommendations of the Master Plan Citizens Committee Task Force on School Buildings, passed with a two-thirds voter majority (the only one to pass by that margin in the state of California). Now over thirty of the ninety school buildings in the city are to be rebuilt, in each case with community involvement in the planning process. All this just three years after a tax override election received only 17 percent voter support.

This document is a social history of Oakland's Master Plan Citizens Committee. It approaches the committee's work from the perspective of the participants and examines what the experience has meant to them and what they feel the Master Plan effort has meant to the Oakland schools. Frederick Willman, the author, and Frederick Eberstadt, the photographer, have, I believe, done a masterful job of reporting firsthand experiences, which, as such experiences are apt to, do not necessarily dovetail, nor represent the goals of the "sponsor." This is entirely fitting, for the experiences are those of the people who have the heaviest investment in making inner-city schools work. If there is something to be learned from Oakland, it is that the community can be a good friend rather than a bad enemy - a vital force in any program of fundamental reform in urban education.

November 1975 John H. Knowles, M.D.

"All the committees, all the talk, all the quarreling, all the new teaching methods, all the leadership development programs have meaning only in terms of their contribution to the ultimate objective: making it possible for a child to grow as fully as possible."



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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps we will have to wait for the year 2000 to have gained a settled perspective on the prodigious attempts to improve American education in the 1950's and 1960's.

Even at this date, without the benefit of hindsight, we can note the staggering energies that went into reform in those years. To this reporter it sometimes seems that we published more books about education, issued more government and foundation reports about education, passed more laws about education in that twenty-year span than we did in the entire previous history of the Republic.

What did we achieve?

To answer that question, we must ask another: What were the intentions of the reform movement? Surprising as it may seem in view of the diversity of the educational changes, the reforms were made in the name of a common ideal - equality of opportunity for minority groups and the poor. This was not the only objective - reforms were aimed at and "demonstrated" in white, affluent school districts as well - but equal educational opportunities were a major preoccupation of educational thinkers trying to reconcile the purposes of formal education with the realities of everyday life.

The Ford Foundation

Between 1950 and 1970, the Ford Foundation sought to overhaul the school machinery. In the 1950's, it gave out $50 million in grants to train more and better teachers, to encourage better use of teacher time and talents, to develop team teaching, to use teacher aides, and to increase the use of technological machines such as television, tape, and teaching machines.

The fifties for Ford were mainly a period of researching new techniques. In the 1960's it gave out $30 million in grants to institutionalize innovations in schools throughout the country. As

the decade ripened, this "Comprehensive School Improvement Program" which had sought to stimulate pilot projects in wealthy as well as poor school districts was now redirected to focus upon the needs of schools serving disadvantaged children. This new emphasis, which fit the Foundation's original objective of equality, was called "compensatory education." The compensatory approach saw the teacher - plus new instruction methods and materials - as the key to improving the schools.

As the decade waned, the educational bureaucrats began to have their doubts that this emphasis was enough. The teacher had a poor kid for only six or eight hours a day. The rest of the time, the child could be either in a troubled home or on the bruising streets. How could that time be used for the educational growth of a child?

Parent Involvement

Somehow, you had to get parents involved in their child's education. This perception of the educator coincided with the cry of parents in inner-core areas for more involvement with schools in which their children's reading scores were dipping lower and lower. Ford underwrote the first experiment in community participation in school decisions when it supported parents in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district in Brooklyn. The experiment led to a harsh confrontation with the teachers' union and the central board.

The strain of that first effort did not discourage Ford in working out the difficulties of parent involvement in the school-decision process. And now Ford had an ally, the Rockefeller Foundation, which was anxious to make more headway with its own Equal Opportunity program. The two foundations and the San Francisco Foundation helped get an ambitious, community participation, "Master Plan" effort under way in Oakland. After the first year, the Rockefeller Foundation assumed total responsibility for the project.

This report charts the efforts of the RF to encourage community participation in Oakland - efforts which appear to have succeeded. Perhaps most interesting about the RF community participation programs are the goals: equal opportunity, the development of leaders, and the shaping of purposeful lives - what today would be called "the affective domain."

If these then were some of the intentions and immediate results of educational reform in the last two decades, what has been achieved? Perhaps one can

suggest some questions which may make the eventual reply illuminating: did the reforms contribute to an integrated society, enlightened political leaders, an unselfish national commitment to improving all facets of our environment? Did they elevate the language of our discourse, give us a new respect for what children can teach us, and instruct us again to heed the wisdom of the old?

Reading scores are important if for no other reason than that these kids have to run a fast and perilous race to get into college. But we must expect more of education if we are not going to perish by our own uncaring.

Frederick Willman

CHAPTER I

"There are enough of us who care enough to make sure it works. We just can't sign off from the human race."

Mrs. Mary Strauss, parent
Howard Elementary School

Chapter 1

Master Plan: Its Past, Its Future

"There is no there there," wrote Gertrude Stein about her native Oakland.

At least, that is what the Berkeley intellectuals say she wrote. They like the epigram. It's a clever thing to repeat at lunch in one of the new, stunning, appetizing restaurants along the seafront. It's a smart thing to say during a stroll around Lake Merritt and the glorious new museum on its shore. And it makes a good put-down, even after someone has described something Oakland happens to be doing and San Francisco is not.

Once upon a time, Oakland may have lacked a spiritual center of gravity - institutions and a public attitude which reflect the turmoil of life and which somehow still hold out the promise of decency and change. The materialism of the frontier may still influence the city - yet the fact is, Berkeley intellectuals work there and one of the most interesting experiments in American education is going on there.

In the summer of 1970, the Oakland Board of Education admitted that it was losing touch with the new black majority in the city. Uncertain about dealing with the clamor for change - the Black Panther movement which had begun in Oakland was a symtom of deeper ailments - the board hired Marcus Foster, a remarkable black educator from Philadelphia, as its new superintendent of schools.

The Master Plan

Before the year was out, Foster and Robert Blackburn, a brilliant white administrator whom Foster had brought along from the East, had decentralized the school system into three regions.

Over the winter, the two men helped ignite a more ambitious effort to make the system more responsive to

the community. By the spring of 1971, parents, students, teachers, administrators, other school employees, the Board of Education, and a number of business, civic, and community groups joined together to launch the Oakland Public Schools' Master Plan Citizens Committee. Operating under school system auspices, the committee was - to use its own words - "initiated as part of the District's commitment to broaden and nurture more effective school/community decision-sharing mechanisms."

That fall, the Board of Education held public meetings to get community answers to fundamental questions: what should the Master Plan Citizens Committee do, who should be represented on it, and how should representatives be chosen?

A tidy structure evolved, at least on paper. At the bottom, planning committees, consisting of parents plus school and community people, were created at many of the city's 91 schools. With the concurrence of the principal (who, it must be emphasized, was a member), a local school site committee could initiate reforms and improvements in various areas, for example, curriculum or the condition of the school building. These local committees elected represenatives to serve on each of the six citywide task forces, which would make major recommendations to the Board of Education on such matters as decentralization and school finances. The task forces composed the middle level of the three-tiered structure, making up a paper entity called "The Master Plan Citizens Committee." At the top was the Coordinating Council. Its members included the chairman and two representatives of each task force; the Superintendent of Schools, Foster; the Deputy Superintendent, Blackburn; and the Staff Coordinator - Elliott Medrich, at the time a 23-year-old graduate student at Berkeley. The council hired consultants for the task forces and attempted to give Master Plan a direction.

Several other features of the Plan were notable. Six community liaison people were hired to help the school site committees get information they needed and to provide a tangible human link among the three levels. The most important element of the plan was the leadership training program (called the Site Committee Assistance Project). The program had two phases. In the first, consultants taught site committees how to conduct meetings. To make it easier for people to attend the meetings, each of the city's 91 schools received a $250 mini-fund which a local site committee could use to pay the

baby-sitting or transportation costs of those attending. The second phase of the leadership development program offered grants to site committees that wanted to undertake innovations in, say, curriculum or teaching techniques.

Funding

From the beginning, Master Plan has been supported by outside funding. Three foundations have been involved - the San Francisco Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The first two foundations assisted Master Plan in its first year. Rockefeller has been involved almost from the beginning; it awarded a $175,000 grant to cover the period between December 31, 1971 to June 30, 1973, and gave another $225,000 for a second year that ended June 30, 1974. The Rockefeller money was used to pay the salaries of the community liaisons, the staff coordinator (Medrich), and an executive secretary (Mary Pantoja); the fees of consultants to the task forces and the site committees; the mini-grants and special project grants to the local committees; and the incidental office expenses.

Self-Evaluation: Strengths

In November 1973, Marcus Foster was murdered as he was leaving his office, ambushed by three people later identified as members of the Symbionese Liberation Army. In May 1974, the Master Plan Committee, still functioning despite the tragedy, requested a third year of funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. In its request, the committee noted what it considered to be strengths and weaknesses of its past efforts, and suggested new directions. It is useful to synopsize those conclusions because this will give readers some of the history of Master Plan and because a summary of Master Plan's self-evaluation will be a convenient reference point when we hear the statements of people involved.

The report cites a number of strong points in its past performance. There "is no doubt that serious involvement of the community in school affairs is here to stay," it claims. It points to the successful proposals that task forces have made to the Board of Education, to the access that MPCC participants have had to the superintendent's office, and to the support of the plan by senior administrators in the central office of the Oakland Public Schools.

The report acknowledges the advantages of outside funding. Because of foundation assistance, MPCC has been able to remain autonomous within the

schools while still being responsive to the board. It has been able to raise and pursue issues without waiting for board initiative, to hire consultants who give its work - in the eyes of the board - a degree of expertise, and to develop leaders by teaching people the essentials of running meetings.

The multi-level structure of MPCC has made it possible for the public to see the plan as neither a lofty "blue ribbon" committee nor as a parochial, localized group but rather as a genuinely broad and open movement. For the first time, the report claims, "individual schools because of the MPCC linkup are beginning to think in terms of a 'whole district' - i.e., that somehow needs are related to one another."

The MPCC report notes that while the concept of school/community decision-sharing was to be institutionalized in the public school system on a permanent basis, the structure through which this could occur was not ever intended to be fixed. As a result of this developmental approach, MPCC has succeeded in winning board support and has placed its main emphasis on program planning and action rather than on policy objectives.

And, finally, Master Plan, in the eyes of its participants, has helped create a "high level of knowledge, understanding, and sophistication about school planning and administration among the many who have participated actively in Master Plan activities." This has enhanced its credibility with the community and its ability to obtain board support. "The fact that its proposals have had a visible effect on district policies and programs distinguishes MPCC from other planning bodies whose reports and recommendations have simply been filed or shelved."

...And Weaknesses

The report then discusses the weak points of MPCC. The citywide task forces have not always had clear goals and objectives. In part this was a result of the district's desire to permit task forces to define for themselves the things they wished to study. The pressure to perform has meant "a tendency to over-emphasize program development, often at the expense of broader policy questions. This was not unreasonable and suggests a slight contradiction in the model itself. Developing programs leads to immediate and visible results and thus there can be observable change."

Further, the task forces and coordinating council have not established

solid communication with and accountability to school sites, and the reverse is also true. "One might even say that two different personalities became attracted to the Master Plan process: those who brought with them a concern for the big picture (organization representatives) and those who had special concern for facilitating change at the school site their child attended."

This lack of good communication and the fact that people's energies burn out after a while have narrowed the broadly representative base that characterized the Master Plan in the beginning. One result of the turnover is that "overburdened chairpersons have tried to provide continual updates for newcomers while still keeping 'regulars' interested." And partly because of only intermittent rapport among the three levels, school site activities have assumed a less important role despite Master Plan policy which states they are key.

In addition, while the Superintendent and the Board of Education have lent their resources to MPCC, "it has been difficult to keep regional staff, middle-level...administrative staff, and principals well informed...." And "with a few notable exceptions, school principals have been minimally involved in Master Plan activities to date" though "the Oakland Principals' Association has representatives serving on several Task Forces.... Given their demanding work schedules this is not entirely unreasonable, but functionally principals occupy pivotal positions within the District.... Our concern is that Master Plan seems to have had only mixed success in meeting the needs of principals in their roles as leaders of the school-community decision-sharing process. Yet it is clear that forging a strong link with the principals will be vital to institutionalizing the Master Plan concept in Oakland."

Participation

Here we see the political shrewdness and daring of the school-community program as it developed in Oakland. The community is to participate in decision-making, not control it. The ultimate objective is to institutionalize a commitment to the community, not to perpetuate a temporary structure like Master Plan. And the key element in achieving this institutionalization is the principal. As we will see in a moment, that latter insight forms the basis for one of the key proposals in Master Plan's future policy.

The Master Plan proposals for change fall into two major categories -

structure and staffing. The most important point about structure is its declaration that the school site advisory committees be the basic units of citizen participation and that they be mandated by the Board of Education. In choosing the compulsory rather than voluntary approach, Master Plan is asking the Oakland Board of Education to follow the example of other boards - as in Los Angeles where mandated local site committees have been operating for several years, and the State Board of Education in Florida where such committees are in the process of being created.

The purpose of the proposal is to make the individual school the basic unit of educational accountability. Thus local committees are urged to make regular reports to the community about school expenditures, actions to achieve program objectives, and proposed methods to evaluate future plans.

Role of the Site Committees

The local principal is charged with the responsibility to organize a site committee. He will be a nonvoting member of that committee but he, not the committee, will have the power of final decision: he has to if he is to be accountable for his school's performance.

Some other points should be mentioned concerning the site committees. Their purpose is to advise the principal on the educational needs of the school community and on budget priorities. Once a year, the committee and the principal should assess the needs of the school and propose procedures to meet them. A committee has no authority to participate in any evaluation of a school staff member - a clear way of telling teachers and principals that the committees won't interfere with the traditional, prescribed methods of assessing a professional's performance.

Representatives on a committee must include parents, nonparents with community interests, students at the secondary level (at least one from each year), teachers, lunchroom and janitorial workers and, as we've noted, the principal as an ex-officio, nonvoting member. Committee members would serve for a specific length of time.

This conveys the character and importance of the local site committees. Master Plan asks that congresses - composed of representatives from the local committees - be created in each of the three administrative regions and that they meet regularly. And it calls for regionwide and citywide short-term study groups to serve as successors to the existing task forces.

Role of the Principal

Aside from the proposal calling for mandated local committees, Master Plan's other significant revision is its decision that principals should be major agents of community involvement.

It recommends that a principal in each of the three regions would, for a period of one year, serve on special assignment. Working out of the Regional Associate Superintendent's office and reporting directly to him, the "Master Plan Principal on Special Assignment" would be charged with providing technical assistance to local site committees in the region and would serve as a "resource" to the regional congress and to the citywide study committees.

Master Plan is quite careful to list its reasons for deciding that principals should lead the community participation effort: principals know the district and the bureaucracy better than other school personnel and better than outsiders.

They can talk with other principals as peers and thus would be more persuasive than nonprincipals in getting their colleagues to accept the responsibility for putting proposals into action. This peer relationship would also help the special assignment principals in developing in-service programs that would teach fellow principals how to present budget material to community groups, as well as teaching principals and community groups how to get along with each other.

Advantages

It is interesting to see how the proposed reforms could correct some of the major weaknesses perceived by Master Plan as it reviews its early years. The decision to operate largely on one level - the local site committee - rather than three, would remove the problem of communication among levels that plagued Master Plan. Further, making the site committee the sole accountable unit would mean that interested citizens would have to work there or nowhere else; thus the new structure might attract the "big picture" people as well as the "little picture" people in contrast to the old, three-tiered structure which had the effect of creating two energy-wasting forces. Third, regularized procedures such as a fixed term of service might reduce the "burn out" factor. And finally, the mandated nature of the committees would encourage all participants to take them more seriously.

The use of principals on both a regional and a site basis to advance

Master Plan also promises to be a canny move. For one thing, one would be using the establishment to reform itself. (Of course, this could boomerang as some Master Plan participants fear.) And by getting professionals within the system rather than outside citizens to lead the way, Master Plan foresees a more productive structure which will not suffer if the attention of some citizens flags.

This, in just a few words, is the essence of the Master Plan. But, of course, a movement is more than committees and rhetoric, plans and procedures. If it succeeds, it does so because of the people who participate. It is people talking about themselves and others who provide the clearest insights into social experience. Now is the time to look at some of these people.

CHAPTER 2

"My view is that if the child needs clothes, then the first business of the school is to get him clothes, especially if the system does not work to meet this need."

Marcus Foster in Making Schools Work

Chapter 2

Marcus Foster and Open Education

If the movement for community participation in the life of Oakland's public schools has sunk some deep roots, then the first question we must ask is why?

Part of the answer lies with a school board that was willing to make changes and the two men whom it chose to lead the system in a time of change: Marcus Foster and Robert Blackburn.

What is interesting about the two educators and what perhaps best explains their success is how alike they were. Both Foster, the black man born in Atlanta, and Blackburn, the white man born in Santa Monica, were Eastern intellectuals. Both worked in the Philadelphia school system during the Mark Shedd reform years - Foster as a high school principal and associate superintendent attached to the central office, and Blackburn as an official in the system's Office of Community Affairs. Both were skillful public speakers who could talk to principals or community groups in their own language. They were adept at inspiring a crowd or calming one down. And, perhaps most importantly in terms of our discussion, both were among the nation's most successful practitioners of what can be called humanistic or affective-domain education, which essentially is open education in and out of the classroom.

Open Education

It is this latter point which some observers believe gets closest to the meaning of the Master Plan experience. The open education philosophy of Foster and Blackburn seems to have been the necessary intellectual scaffolding for the community participation effort; without it, it is hard to visualize how there could have been a Master Plan.

One can understand this if one simplifies the contrasts between the

traditionalist and innovative attitudes toward education.

Traditionalists accept the authoritarian atmosphere of the old-time learning situation. Teaching is a one-way street. The teacher speaks, the child listens. The traditionalist believes that discipline - the imposed kind - is a course in itself which kids take along with the others and which they require if they are to succeed in the others. As for those other courses, they are reading, writing, and arithmetic. If a child acquires these basic skills, he will acquire confidence in himself.

A Different Experience

For Foster and Blackburn, the classroom experience was entirely different. They saw it as a democratic, not an autocratic, process. For them, teaching was a two-way street: a teacher let the child know that he could learn as much from the child as the child could from him. In this kind of atmosphere, they argue, a child can develop self-discipline so that the enforced kind is not necessary; and more important, he builds up his self-esteem. "To move people, start where they are," Foster wrote in Making Schools Work (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1971). What he meant was, start with what a child knows, not what he doesn't know. If a child is good at telling stories and terrible at reading, the teacher should applaud his storytelling until he reaches the point at which he is anxious to correct his reading deficiency.

Traditionalists feel that if a school does its job the child will feel confident. Foster and Blackburn counter that reading skills in themselves cannot always generate self-esteem because a student's image of himself is affected not only by what happens in the classroom but also by what happens outside it. What about the child who comes to school with tattered clothing, or who has emotional problems at home? How can that distracted child learn how to read? The traditionalist admits that these are serious handicaps but he replies that other experts such as social workers or psychiatrists must confront those problems; a school administrator or teacher does not have the time or resources to deal with them.

Making Schools Work

Foster and Blackburn had a different definition of the educator, which perhaps best explained their emphasis on self-worth. In Making Schools Work, which should be required reading for every school person and parent in the country,

Foster wrote eloquently of the contrast between the traditional and innovative roles of teachers.

"Some people, of course, will reject this notion of 'leader-educator.' There are principals, for instance, who freely admit that hunger and poor clothing were crippling the academic performance of their students. Yet for years they had done nothing about it. 'After all,' they said, 'if the School Board doesn't allocate money to clothe the children, what can I do? I'm having enough problems with my book requisition.'

"A person operating this way needs to change his job. He ought to be working in a social environment where the pupils come to school well dressed and where it makes sense for the principal not to worry about clothing. My view is that if the child needs clothes, then the first business of the school is to get him clothes, especially if the system does not work to meet this need.

"I remember one time we went to all the cleaning establishments in the neighborhood and told them we were willing to take any unclaimed clothing off their hands. We got all we needed.

"You might call this scavenging, but fundamentally what we were doing was bringing in 'materials' that the children needed if they were to learn. We knew, as the social scientists often said, that if a youngster feels unpresentable, he probably will have a hard time learning. This is just what the angry teacher, quoted earlier, was saying. The difference is: we were willing to intervene directly even if it didn't look like the teacherly thing to do.

"A principal must constantly assess the needs of his particular children. If the task boils down to orchestrating the learning process - seeing that the materials are available, demonstrating their use, etc. - fine. If that's what is needed, get it done.

"But if the situation calls for something more, if there are home problems or nutritional problems, then the principal and his staff simply have to become part social worker, part mediator, part dietician. One time we got the Boeing-Vertol Company to 'adopt' our school as part of a massive vocational development program. I felt like an entrepreneur."

Community Participation

In his first remarks to the Oakland staff in 1970, Foster said, "I have alluded to the importance of community involvement. I am not talking about window dressing. A school insulated from its

community never was a good idea. Nowadays, it is impossible. The people must have meaningful roles in making decisions in order for them to have legitimate means of expressing their power."

And yet, Foster was always careful to point out the limits of community participation. "Notice, I keep talking about community participation in the decision-making process. I am not talking about community control because there is no such thing as community control. Schools are state institutions. We are bound by state statutes; many of our powers simply cannot be given to the communities.

"But we can share, in increasingly effective ways, our decision-making prerogatives. While the school site will be the place where such transactions will take place, the central office will be committed to assisting you and making necessary resources available. It will be our responsibility to see that the notion of community involvement stretches beyond the single schools and encompasses the entire city."

Foster's realism about the limits of community participation is surely a further reason why it worked in Oakland and why it did not work in Ocean Hill-Brownsville several years earlier.

The open education philosophy of Foster and Blackburn, reflecting needs inside and outside the classroom, and their considerable skills in psychology and politics, made Master Plan work. It is possible that the most skilled administrator with a traditionalist approach could not have done better.

CHAPTER 3

"There is nobody more important in urban education than the principal."

Robert Blackburn
Acting Superintendent
Oakland Public Schools

Chapter 3

Robert Blackburn

In his three years as superintendent in Oakland, Marcus Foster set the school system on its way toward accountability, decentralization, and community participation. He led parents on a march to Sacramento where they successfully persuaded the legislature to give more money to the state's schools. He lobbied at the City Council for a greater portion of federal funds. He - and Blackburn - went out every night to meet with citizens' groups to get Master Plan started. Many things happened because of Foster's dizzying energies and not the least of them was the city's passage of a school bond issue for the first time in seventeen years.

Is this the End?

On November 6, 1973, Foster and Blackburn left a school board meeting at the central office and walked towards Blackburn's car in the parking lot. They never made it. In an insane act, whose motive has never been adequately explained, three persons shot Foster to death, pumping cyanide-tipped bullets into his body. Blackburn, critically wounded himself, crawled back to the school building for help. Nothing could help Foster, who had been killed instantly. Blackburn, twenty-four wounds in his body, survived. He was the first person in the Oakland School District I spoke to.

As acting superintendent of the Oakland schools, Blackburn was sitting in Foster's old office when I interviewed him. On the desk were pictures of Foster with Blackburn's kids. On the wall was a calendar commemorating gifted blacks whom white historians had ignored. He was fiddling with papers when I walked in.

Robert Blackburn is 39 years old. He is a slim six footer, with a triangle

of dark brown hair which starts from a point in front and widens out as it goes back; and he moves like a tennis player, which he is. He is an extremely gentle man, a very articulate man, a very funny man. He can jump in and out of a New York accent at the slightest provocation, making his hands as well as his voice play the part. He is at home with literature. How could a smart guy like this stay smart while working himself up through a school system?

Foster had come up through the system and his humanity had survived. Blackburn had had it a little easier. He was a lateral entry into the school bureaucracy and this had given him certain strengths as an administrator.

An Interview

The son of a frequently transferred airlines pilot, Blackburn was born in Santa Monica, California, and lived all over the country. He did his undergraduate work at Oberlin College, spending one year in an exchange program at Hampton Institute, the black college in Virginia. Then he moved to Philadelphia where he worked with the National Conference of Christians and Jews and later, the Citizens Committee on Public Education. He got a master's degree in Intergroup Education at the University of Pennsylvania. In the mid-60's, he ran a Peace Corps program in East Africa, taking his wife and kids along. Later, supported by Mark Shedd, the new reform superintendent in Philadelphia, Blackburn joined the school system's Office of Community Affairs where he worked with Foster whom he had met in 1960.

What attracted Foster to Oakland?

"Well, no one was counting Shedd's days at that point (just a short time later, Shedd would be forced out by Mayor Rizzo). So while Marc was considered Shedd's heir apparent by many people, he himself was looking for a greater challenge. He was consulting on the side while working out of the central office. I think he felt it was time to put up or shut up, that he should accept the chance to run a school district the way he had been advising others to. The Oakland system had serious problems, but the board showed an appetite for change."

"How do you account for the board's attitude?"

"I think the board in Oakland did not have some of the serious divisions that other boards had. From the experience they shared in the late 60's they realized that fundamental change was needed. They realized when they selected Marcus that he was not going to be just a kind of secretary of their wishes.

But I don't think anyone could have known how strong a leader he would be."

"When did he become an advocate of community participation?"

"Throughout his career in Philadelphia, he had found that whenever he had to intervene in schools as a principal, and later as an associate superintendent, it had been essential to involve parents in the life of the school. He found it useful to get parents excited about the programs the teachers were trying to operate for their children.

"He felt that urban schools had failed," Blackburn said. "They were operating on suburban social norms, expecting the same things and using the same techniques, though their kids are entirely different. Marc was concerned with the basically close correlation between socio-economic status and school achievement."

"Does this account for the assertion by one authority recently that schooling doesn't affect income?"

"Traditionally, middle class students go through middle class schools and stay in the middle class. Those in the low income bracket don't always get upward mobility, as parents expect. Marcus was anxious to break this correlation."

"Does the fault lie with the teacher and the schools or with the student and his background?"

"Marcus never conceded the fault was with the child. The Master Plan concept is that it isn't the children but the schools that need to change. The students may come with problems, but the schools are responsible for correcting them."

"Even though the kids spend less than eight hours a day in school and sixteen at home?"

"Except," Blackburn said, "and this is the big exception, we bring in parents and train them. If Coleman is right, the problem is the child's impotence. We can say that of parents as well. The Master Plan was a partial effort to break down that impotence, to show that the schools could respond.

"He decried the deficit model where the teacher gets the student with a deficit - a weakness like an inability to read well - and confronts and worries him about the weakness. In that situation, the student is beaten over the head with reading and more reading.

"Marcus believed in building on strengths," Blackburn went on. "He felt strengths should be identified, so the student could gain some confidence and <u>then</u> confront his weakness. He felt this was a manifestation of breaking the

tie of income and achievement. He symbolized personally a different attitude toward children - how they could learn and how they could have more effective lives.. He had the notion that power can't be conferred on people. A person has to discover it. He would wrestle with people and make them wrest the power from him. Master Plan invited people to learn the arts of power and of sharing decisions, and to begin to exercise more responsibility and authority.

"He had an A-B theory: A is the employer, B is the employee; or A is parent, B is child, etc. He felt it was wrong to have this hierarchical model in school. He said if you take this and turn it upside down it's going to be the same. He was looking for a system of parity."

We then spoke of the origins of Master Plan.

"The idea came from within the establishment," I said.

"Not exactly," Blackburn replied. "There were pressures for community involvement that were not generated by the board but by outside groups in the winter and spring of 1970.

"Master Plan was born within the system, but only after the board and administration heard all sorts of cries for community involvement," Blackburn continued. "But you see, only some people heard those cries. So when the board accepted the idea a year later, some people thought it's something the system itself came up with. What you can say is that Master Plan evolved out of a collision of interests - those of the community and those of the board."

We then spoke of the intended shift in emphasis in Master Plan.

"There is nobody more important in urban education than the principal. He is the principal actor. Except for the superintendent, nobody - not the teachers' groups, not parents - are more important. Now most principals haven't had much training in how to work with parents. All they've been told is: provide a warm and supportive climate for parents in your school, so the kids can get their homework done and come to school with sharpened pencils in the morning.

"We want to take three seasoned principals," Blackburn went on, "who've been through the parent problems, who have known the years of pain, who understand why parents raise difficult questions, who can say to other principals: parents aren't going to mess us up. We want three seasoned principals who can say: parents can be a tremendous resource, and maybe if we work as a team in a local school, we can be a garden of

ideas to the people. If you can get principals like that, you'll be much more effective at this stage than if you get some paraprofessionals from the community who say - to the principals - you're a funky old person."

"So the process of change changes itself?" I asked. "You begin by relying on paraprofessionals and then decide to use the establishment as an agent for change?"

"Precisely. But whether we talk about principals or community liaison people, we're just talking about the means to achieve permanent community participation. We want to make sure that community involvement lasts, because we believe that it has an important value to the education of each child in the school. So that everyone gets into the water at once, it must be district-wide."

Blackburn talked at length about the history of voluntary and compulsory actions in this country.

"Some years ago, in intergroup relations, we bought the Dwight Eisenhower idea of changing the hearts of men before you legislate morality. But that was backwards. You've got to change the law first, then get behavior to catch up. If we wait in school systems for attitudes to change, we're cooked.

"What are the lessons for other cities which may or may not have foundation money to get them over the threshold?" I asked. "Take leadership burnout."

"You begin by recognizing that it happens. But you set up processes that minimize the impact. Even without Marc, the district has forged ahead. If you've established the processes right, not relying on personalities, you can go on. Administrators in other school systems don't have to be Marc Fosters, but they do have to find within themselves the conviction that schools cannot operate without the real involvement of parents and concerned citizens."

...ool. He wanted to be left alone. ...
The school ran efficiently. The students were well ...
I'm saying is, when the principal has things going well, he ...
<u>doesn't</u> need you."

Mayola Lewis, Community Liaison

Chapter 4

The Community Liaisons

"Much of the strength of Master Plan is attributable to Elliott Medrich," Blackburn said.

That is not hard to believe.

First in his undergraduate class at the University of Chicago, Medrich got his doctorate in social planning at Berkeley around the time he began working with Foster and Blackburn.

Medrich served as staff coordinator to Master Plan, operating as the energetic, illuminating conduit between Foster and Blackburn on one hand, and citizens on the other. He served in that position in the Plan's first year, 1971-72. The next year he worked abroad. In the fall of 1973, after Foster's death, Medrich rejoined the Master Plan and, while Blackburn recovered from his wounds, struggled to keep it going.

Medrich's impressive intellectual skills, self-confidence, and direct talk did not prevent him from getting along well with the community liaison people, most of whom were black women - older, and without formal education. His rapport with the "liaisons," as the Plan calls them, was important because, as Master Plan was laid out, they were representatives of the local communities who had a glimpse of what was going on at the top, in the superintendent's office. They could bring back a positive or negative image, and this would have a lot to do with their own morale and the interest of the parents at the grass roots level.

Go With What You've Got

One can look at the community liaisons as workers in a program or as symbols of change. Let us first look at them as hired hands.

The liaisons were selected by a community panel representing all the schools in the attendance area in which

they lived. Those panels then went out of existence (which later led to problems of accountability). The liaisons were responsible for organizing site committees at the schools in their area, which meant they had to establish relationships with principals who were occasionally hostile or indifferent; and they were charged with getting information about Master Plan activities to these site committees and with reporting back local developments to people in the central administration.

They worked part time, about four hours a day, getting $3,000 in the first year, and then, after a struggle with the Master Plan Coordinating Council, $6,500 the second year. At the time I visited Oakland, all six were women, five of them black. How effective have they been?

"The Foster style was, go with what you've got," says Medrich. "'Concentrate on where you will most likely achieve success.' This applied not only to teaching approaches with pupils, but also to our decisions about where to begin forming site committees. We wanted to build success models, so we chose schools where the relationships between principals and teachers were good. The liaisons did a good job of choosing these sites and getting things done there."

In 1973, while Medrich was in Europe, the community liaisons became the center of contention. They spent most of that year trying to get salary increases from the Coordinating Council and did not appear to be making any new breakthroughs with school site committees.

"When I got back, I met with the liaisons. I said, you're not working for the Council, you're working for me. One person had to be in control, to point to them and say this is what's to be done. I talked to them individually. I laid out the ground rules, performance criteria, assessment standards and, most important, a set of expectations for the schools where there had been no change since 1971.

"They now give me monthly reports instead of occasional ones, and this has made them examine their objectives closely. At first they resented it, but now it's become a habit. Their job is to stimulate interest in the community. Well, how do you assess that? One way is to count bodies, but that's not enough - it's the things people <u>do</u> once they come into the schools that really matter."

Medrich reports a series of successes in the problem schools: "Not

surprisingly, many of these schools were 'ripe'; the liaisons enjoyed some major breakthroughs."

The Inevitable Shift

Medrich says that Master Plan's shift in reliance from community liaisons to school principals was inevitable. "At first, we felt we needed an adversary model - to challenge the system. We have used that model well, but as we became more confident that meaningful participation was here to stay, we switched to a more cooperative approach - parents, community, staff, and administrators solving problems together.

Would he go through the community liaison stage again if he were starting all over?

"Yes," Medrich said. "It was natural to start that way; and it's also natural to move now to the new, cooperative process."

New Energies

In view of the coming de-emphasis on the community liaisons, it is useful to regard them not only in terms of what they did as paid employees, but as symbols of the energies that Master Plan released. Brief profiles of two liaisons may serve to make that important point.

Mayola Lewis is black, in her 50's, the mother of four grown children. Like the other woman liaison we will consider, she has a long history of community involvement. She was once active in the PTA but dropped out to work in Master Plan. "The PTA gives people information but it doesn't do anything. It has guidelines forbidding the kind of citizen participation that is possible in Master Plan. PTA just doesn't make the best use of people's resources."

One of the tasks of the community liaisons was to get principals and teachers to attend training sessions at which parents learned how to conduct meetings. Master Plan officials believed that school people would appreciate parents more if they shared with them the process of acquiring such skills.

"At first the teachers and principals in my area did not believe they would learn anything," Mrs. Lewis says. "But by the last session, they had loosened up; they had learned to relate to others. They saw the value of parents knowing how to do something."

She found only one principal who was a real problem. "Elliott said not to force ourselves on principals. Pressure from parents wouldn't help with this man. He said he did not need me or want me, and he did not want parents in the

school. He wanted to be left alone, so I left him alone. The school ran efficiently. The students were well prepared. What I'm saying is, when the principal has things going well, he sometimes doesn't need you."

Credibility

Mrs. Lewis was also chairman of the citywide task force on school buildings. The task force report, selecting sites for new school buildings to replace those that were earthquake-unsafe, was accepted by the Board of Education and was instrumental in making the system's 1973 bond issue successful, the first such issue approved by Oakland voters since 1956. The bond issue's passage came about because of the credibility of Master Plan leaders, a credibility which bond issue advocates in the past had lacked.

"In 1956, black people felt they had been lied to," Mrs. Lewis says. "They had understood that money from the bond issue would be used to rebuild and fix up their schools. So they voted for it. After the election, the money was used to build new schools in high income areas. This turned off the blacks. And the whites wouldn't vote for further bond issues because they had gotten their new schools."

As a result of the bond issue failures, there was little maintenance in schools for seventeen years. At one point, the school board put nearly $500,000 into the budget for maintenance purposes alone. Eventually, however, that money was given to teachers for salary increases, a turnabout which the liaisons - black and white - remember with bitterness. But in 1973, Master Plan's task force on school buildings met with all the city, district, and school-site committees to review plans for rebuilding one-third of Oakland's ninety schools. Accurate information was made available, on which parents - and people in general - could base their votes. In the spring of 1974 a $43 million bond election passed by a vote of over 66 percent - the largest majority in the city's history.

The black liaisons reflect the complicated feelings of black parents toward the schools. They are convinced that an emphasis on self-worth is the only approach that can work with black children and their parents. No one expressed these sentiments better than Mrs. Lewis when she said, "The main thing is that the teacher has to look at a student and recognize that he wants to be

something, and the teacher has to respect that right. The child needs to know that he does something well and be given the chance to do it. A child who is always at the back of the room fighting to achieve recognition can't make it. We need to train teachers to help students see and develop their self-worth."

Mutual Help

Teachers will also have to become more sensitive toward black parents, Mrs. Lewis says. "Once I helped with remedial reading even though I couldn't pronounce some of the words. I would make certain that the child knew I couldn't and then I would ask the teacher. It helped me and it helped the child. But the teachers were suspicious when I worked at school. They assumed I had to work, have a job. 'Oh, do you have enough free time to come to this school? Don't you work?' I didn't have to work. My husband made a decent salary as an aircraft factory worker.

"Parents usually come to school because their child has done something wrong. It is important somehow to talk to parents before their children do wrong things. The parents need to be told positive things about the child. Then, if the parent is called in, there is the feeling that someone doesn't care for the child.

"People have to learn that all blacks aren't on welfare, that all black mammas don't have children without husbands, and that all black children have fathers, whether the fathers are in the home or not."

Mrs. Lewis accumulates into a larger presence each time you see her. People are aware of her as a quiet force to be reckoned with - some are talking about having her run for a city office, perhaps a seat on the Board of Education.

A Boldness for Confrontation

Mrs. Ann Sprague is a white, upper-middle income, professional businesswoman. She and her husband live in an appealing cliff-hanging home in the "hills" area of Oakland, the choice residential part of the city. Mrs. Sprague is an attractive grey-haired lady in her 40's. Like Mrs. Lewis, she's a Democrat but that superficial likeness should not obscure their real differences in political style. Mrs. Lewis, lacking formal skills and education, has survived because she has used compromise imaginatively, taking one backward step if she can take two forward. Mrs. Sprague has a college education (she emphasizes her major was business administration, and her minor,

personnel) and twenty years of business experience behind her. These credentials and an impatient personality have given her a boldness for confrontation. An articulate, likable woman, she puts more faith in plans than psychology.

Mrs. Sprague made this quite clear to me in the first moments of our talk. I said that all the other community liaisons were black and from the flat lands, suggesting I could understand the black community's enthusiasm for Master Plan: one could argue that low-income blacks were more dependent upon public schools than middle-class whites. Mrs. Sprague was white and from the comfortable section of town. What, I wondered, was she doing in Master Plan?

In replying, she discussed the importance of <u>having</u> a plan. She had worked with the League of Women Voters for fifteen years. In 1964 the League had declared that one of the obstacles to abolishing poverty in the United States was a lack of any kind of master plan in education as well as in human resources, social services, and medical care. Mrs. Sprague had been involved in a League group that had studied Oakland's schools between 1970 and 1972 and had helped write a League report that outlined a community participation program closely resembling the Master Plan.

"The distinguishing factor about Master Plan as compared to other reform programs is that this one is a process, not just a document," she said. Mrs. Lewis, sitting on Mrs. Sprague's terrace, nodded. They were in total agreement about that; as interesting was the contrast in their approaches.

Mrs. Sprague serves on the finance task force, was chairman of a site advisory committee at the elementary school one of her children attends, and has been a community liaison for almost a year. She is an enthusiastic supporter of Master Plan and felt that middle- and upper-class whites have had as much trouble influencing the school establishment as lower-income blacks. (Fifteen years ago, highly motivated, active women who had time for volunteer work were the major allies of teachers in their battle for higher salaries. They were convinced that higher salaries would produce better educated children. Today, some feel that fatter paychecks have produced an unresponsive bureaucracy.)

"At Thornhill Elementary School where I have a child and where I was chairman of the advisory committee, we wanted the curricula updated. One parent, who also happened to be

a certified teacher, took it upon herself to develop a program of alternative teaching methods. This group of parents and teachers met weekly for almost a year, visiting schools in other districts to look at new approaches. But at the end of the year, the teachers were still not ready to go ahead with the new methods.

"Then, with some funds from the Master Plan site committee assistance project, the parents worked up a proposal for a private summer school at the Thornhill site which was approved by the district. They hired their own teachers. The program was individualized and ungraded.

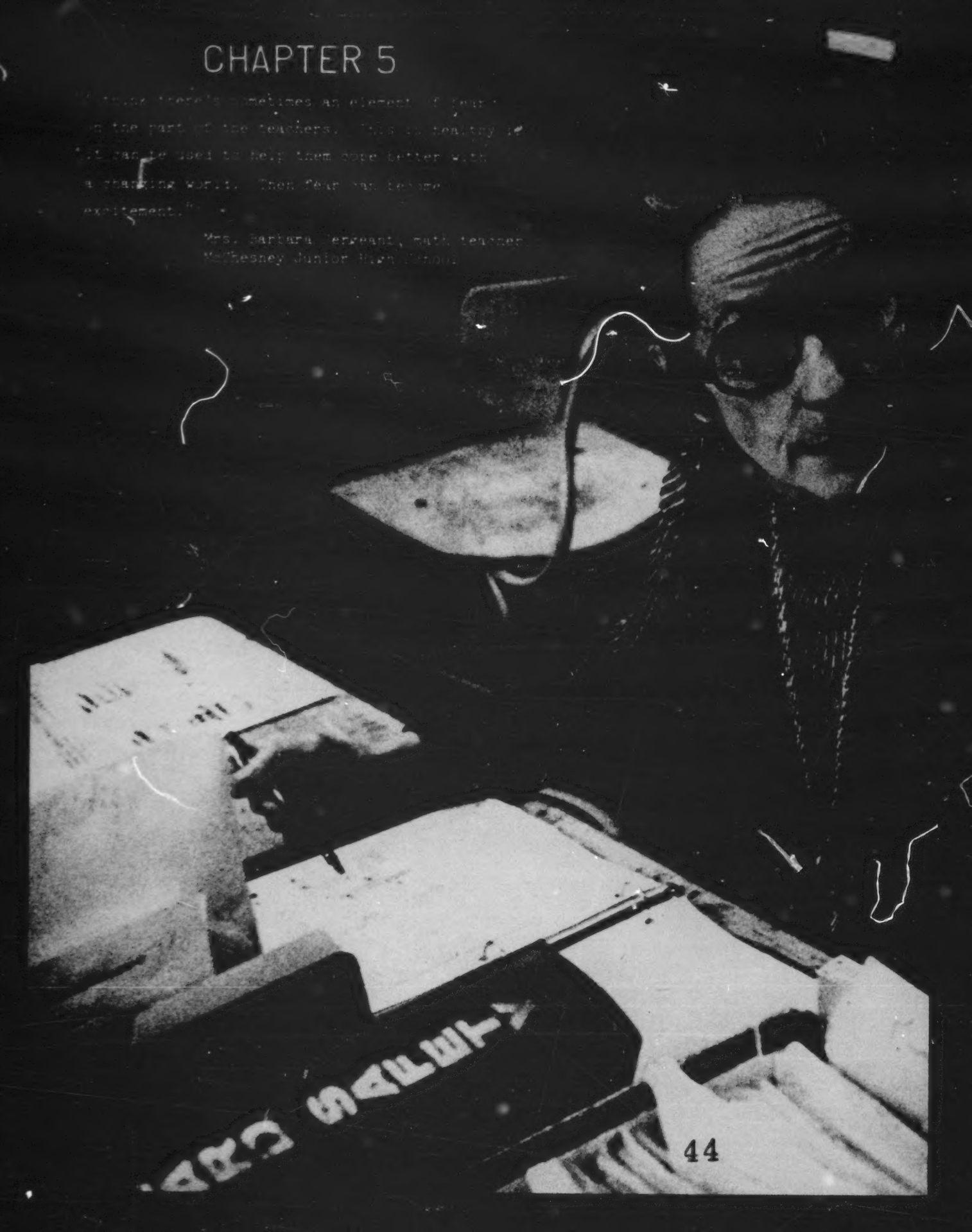
"In the fall, one teacher agreed to teach an individualized first grade - that is, every child could proceed at his own pace. One 1st grade child finished a 6th grade math book. The other teachers watched and became interested. The program worked well so that the school applied for, and got, money from the state's early childhood program. That summer, the teachers were trained in the new, individualized methods. And by the fall of 1973, the kindergarten through 3rd grades were all completely individualized. Two teachers had retired, but none had left the program. All that came about because of the pilot summer program financed by Master Plan."

But change was harder to achieve in the one high school in Oakland that is considered college preparatory, Skyline High School.

Opposition

"Most kids at Skyline expect to go on to college," Mrs. Sprague says. Parents give a lot of help, and they push. The school is not at all that innovative because many teachers stay there for years without changing their courses much, but even so, with a good deal of give and take, parents and teachers were able to initiate a major program innovation, partially funded by Master Plan and offered one day a week. It was called Flex-day. The teachers liked the idea at first. Then they realized that it meant re-writing their notes to give their lectures in four days rather than in five. So, sustaining their commitment was important. We interested a photographer and reporter from a paper in doing a story about the changes. The story was so positive that everyone ended up supporting the effort."

CHAPTER 5



Chapter 5

One Teacher

The kids fight to get into McChesney Junior High School.

It has a large waiting list and parents often lie about where they live so that their children will have a chance to attend. McChesney has an even mix of whites, blacks, and Asians. It offers both individualized and traditional instruction because of an active Master Plan site committee which fought for and got Master Plan and school system funds. And it has an able principal and talented teachers, one of the latter being Mrs. Barbara Sergeant.

Mrs. Sergeant has fireworks in her eyes when she talks about teaching. She has served on the citywide task force on curriculum and on McChesney's site committee. As a member of the latter, she initiated efforts for individualized instruction. She puts in about eighteen hours a day in teaching and Master Plan activities. Besides that, she has also put in a good bit of her own money to keep individualized instruction going at McChesney. She teaches individualized math to slow students who are in the 9th grade and who may not have gotten beyond 1st grade math, even though the schools have promoted them.

New, But Not So Dumb

Mrs. Sergeant has taught in the Oakland system for sixteen years. In her third year of teaching, she was asked to teach 9th grade arithmetic. "I was new and dumb. I didn't realize how many of these kids were considered the dregs. After three months with behavior problems, I talked with the principal - who told me my trouble was I thought I could teach these kids something. He showed me ways to babysit for them. I got angry. I have been ever since. I realized that we were teaching smart kids

well, but we were losing the slower kids. We had to adjust work to the level of each child, but this was not easy. With 35 kids in a class, you have abilities ranging from the 1st to 8th grades." Why had these kids been promoted? "There are very serious problems when you hold a child back. For example, he may be fine in reading but lousy in math. Do you promote him or hold him back?"

Soon after her talk with the principal, Mrs. Sergeant began the difficult task of creating an individualized math course. It was not easy; there were few "how-to" materials around to help her. She began by taking a math book, dividing it into levels, and making up tests for each level. She had to stay up late making up tests for the fast students and she had trouble keeping track of it all. Eventually, another teacher introduced her to materials about individualized instruction, notably a programmed course. Then she discovered she had to pre-test and post-test for progress. When the new math came on the scene, she went through the process all over again.

New Chance

When Master Plan was started, Mrs. Sergeant realized it gave McChesney a chance to institutionalize its innovations. So she and a few other teachers worked out a pilot program for individualized instruction and managed to get it funded by Master Plan and the Oakland Public Schools. The pilot program went into effect in the summer of 1972, beginning with the in-service training of eight teachers. That fall, three months into the school year, the site committee applied for a second summer of funding. This time, half the faculty applied - among them, the original eight. The committee also realized that teachers' aides were necessary to the success of individualized instruction: they handled the bulk of the class while the professional teacher concentrated on one or two kids. So the committee applied for additional money for aides.

A Right to Be There

An effective political relationship had formed between an energetic site committee - consisting of the principal, three teachers, three students, and three community members - and a regional superintendent who fought for the committee's requests. "We just refused to be stopped," Mrs. Sergeant said. "We felt we had

a right to be there. We'd done our homework; we knew we had a good thing. We had leverage because of Master Plan. In the fall, we were ready to make another presentation for money and got a call that Marcus Foster had been killed. We thought we were finished, but the regional superintendent said he would carry us until December. We went on for the whole year, not knowing where the money came from. Then, that June, we got our money retroactively."

Individualized instruction is not for all teachers or for all students. This approach probably helped McChesney's site committee pry money from Master Plan and the school system. "Some teachers can't handle the confusion," Mrs. Sergeant says, "but they remain fine teachers. If it's going to work, we need in-service training on an institutionalized basis, preferably when the teachers are still at college. We think that with such training the average teacher can handle it. One of our favorite success stories has to do with a teacher we'd all hoped would leave Oakland. In the first year he taught the individualized way, his referrals - the numbers of kids he sent to the principal's office for discipline - dropped 85 percent.

"And it's not for all kids, either. Some kids can't handle the freedom of choice. By their own admission, they can function only in a large group. Group pressure moves them along. They don't like independence."

A Huge Roar

When I spoke to Mrs. Sergeant, she was not certain where the money would come from for the 1974-75 program which, for the first time, would be on an institutionalized rather than pilot basis. "I bet we're going to get it, though. If we don't, there's going to be a huge roar from the community."

I had one last question for her. "I've heard that some of the teachers resent nonprofessionals coming in and trying to change their ways."

"Some resent it," Mrs. Sergeant said. "Some community members don't know how to participate well in the school scene. I think there's sometimes an element of fear on the part of the teachers. This is healthy if it can be used to help them cope better with a changing world. Then fear can become excitement."

One of Marcus Foster's most striking achievements was his method for allowing teachers and community people to participate in the process of choosing

their principal. This is how the current principal of McChesney Junior High School was selected:

When a vacancy for that office occurred, the superintendent's office sent the names of 25 applicants - Mrs. Edna Brewer's was among them - to the school's Master Plan site committee, which was composed of teachers, parents, and students. The committee interviewed each of the candidates; it had to nominate three. If it had found it could not do that, Foster would have recruited other applicants and the process would have started all over again. On the other hand, the superintendent was free to choose one of the committee's three or none at all. If he took the latter course, however, the search would begin once more. Thus, neither element could impose its will on the other, yet each could influence the ultimate choice. As it was, the McChesney panel settled on three candidates and Foster chose one of them, Mrs. Brewer. According to Barbara Sergeant, Mrs. Brewer was largely responsible for the successful efforts to reform curricula.

CHAPTER 6

[illegible] you'[illegible] in a school you have
[illegible] two generations, the parents [illegible]
the children."

David [illegible], Principal
Skyline [illegible]

Chapter 6

One Principal

David Swanson became principal of Skyline High School in 1971. Some school people cast him as an educational conservative; Swanson calls himself a reformer. He is a man so even that a flawless reproduction of his words would only confuse. But these qualities do not reflect his essence, as I realized when I became sensitive to two currents of thought which I had heard but had not really listened to, in the weeks I had studied citizen involvement in the public schools.

The first concerns the potential conflict inherent in administrative decentralization, which gives school site principals more authority but requires them to live with community participation. How one regards the square-off often depends upon one's point of view. If one is looking at the school system, one may instinctively side with a principal when he does battle with the hierarchy. But one's sympathies may switch if the contest is between the principal and a site committee. In this situation, an outsider who favors community participation may look upon the principal as the bad guy if he is perceived as a conservative, and the site committee or the community is the good guy if it is seen as the force for change.

The school must reflect the community, you will say. But what if the community is quite conservative? And what if the principal is the reformer? Do you regard the community in that situation as a force that must be heeded, or ignored, or persuaded to change? Master Plan postulates that a principal is accountable for the performance of teachers and students in his school. Therefore he, not the community, must have the final word.

The second point that became clear to me is related to the first. School

principals are political creatures. Unlike teachers and parents, they are responsible to more than one constituency. As they work their way up through a school system to become supervisors and superintendents, some remain political creatures and speak a language that conceals intention. Others, like Foster, can engage in politics without being done in. How do you distinguish between the two kinds? The first get little done. The second, indirectly or directly, leave a school better than they found it.

Before becoming principal at Skyline High School, Swanson was principal of a junior high school in a predominantly black, poor neighborhood of Oakland. Like black parents in some other communities, those at that junior high school had no use for PTA, but were quite receptive to a Master Plan committee which Swanson helped organize before moving on to become principal of Skyline.

Politics made Skyline. In 1961, the Oakland Board of Education, anxious to discourage white flight, decided to build a high school - the district's sixth - that would have a chance of remaining white. Today, it has some 2,000 white students making up 80 percent of the student body, and about 500 blacks who are at Skyline because of open enrollment.

Skyline is considered the high school in Oakland that best prepares students for college; on the other hand, it is known for being very conservative in its teaching methods. Parents throughout the city are anxious to enroll their children at the school but because it can't accommodate everybody, Swanson says he spends a considerable amount of time telling parents their children can't come.

Is Change Needed?

When Swanson arrived at Skyline, the school was just beginning to get into Master Plan activities. Swanson was committed to the concept - "the community is my boss" - but he saw two opposing groups that could subvert his plans for orderly change. The first was a minority of parents who wanted changes which Swanson felt were unsound. "They wanted to make specific decisions that were my responsibility - decisions about the curriculum." But it was not only a matter of procedure that bothered Swanson; it was the content of the reforms. "Some of our teachers, parents, and kids wanted a free school on the campus. A school within a school. We give X number of

teachers X number of kids and let them do their thing. I can't go that way. I think it's a poor use of taxpayer's money and it's a cop out." Thus, Swanson twice rejected site committee proposals for a school within a school.

But as the conversation proceeded, Swanson revealed that his main challenge was the second group, the majority of parents composed of whites and middle class blacks who favor the traditional approach. "I believe that if I sent out a questionnaire to parents, they would vote overwhelmingly for a traditional school," he said.

"Let me tell you why change is necessary. This is personal," said Swanson. "I have an older staff. They have migrated to my Hill school out of seniority. Teachers are like other human beings, it's easier for them to teach in traditional ways. So they plod along teaching subject matter, forgetting whether or not the kids are learning anything. I have a good staff, but we all need to be rejuvenated. Flex-day, for example, is going to shake the tree. They're going to have to strengthen their grip to hold on.

"Any time you're working in a school you have to educate two generations, the parents and the children," Swanson remarked. His strategy in persuading the conservative majority to go along with Flex-day - a program permitting students to take seminars in career education one day a week - is interesting.

The site committee had several proposals before it. One was the free school, which Swanson rejected. Two others concerned a computer education plan and a multimedia instructional center. Swanson threw the Flex-day idea before the committee and aggressively pushed for its adoption. "Ultimately it had the consensus of the committee, but I didn't let them vote."

"Because you felt it would lose?"

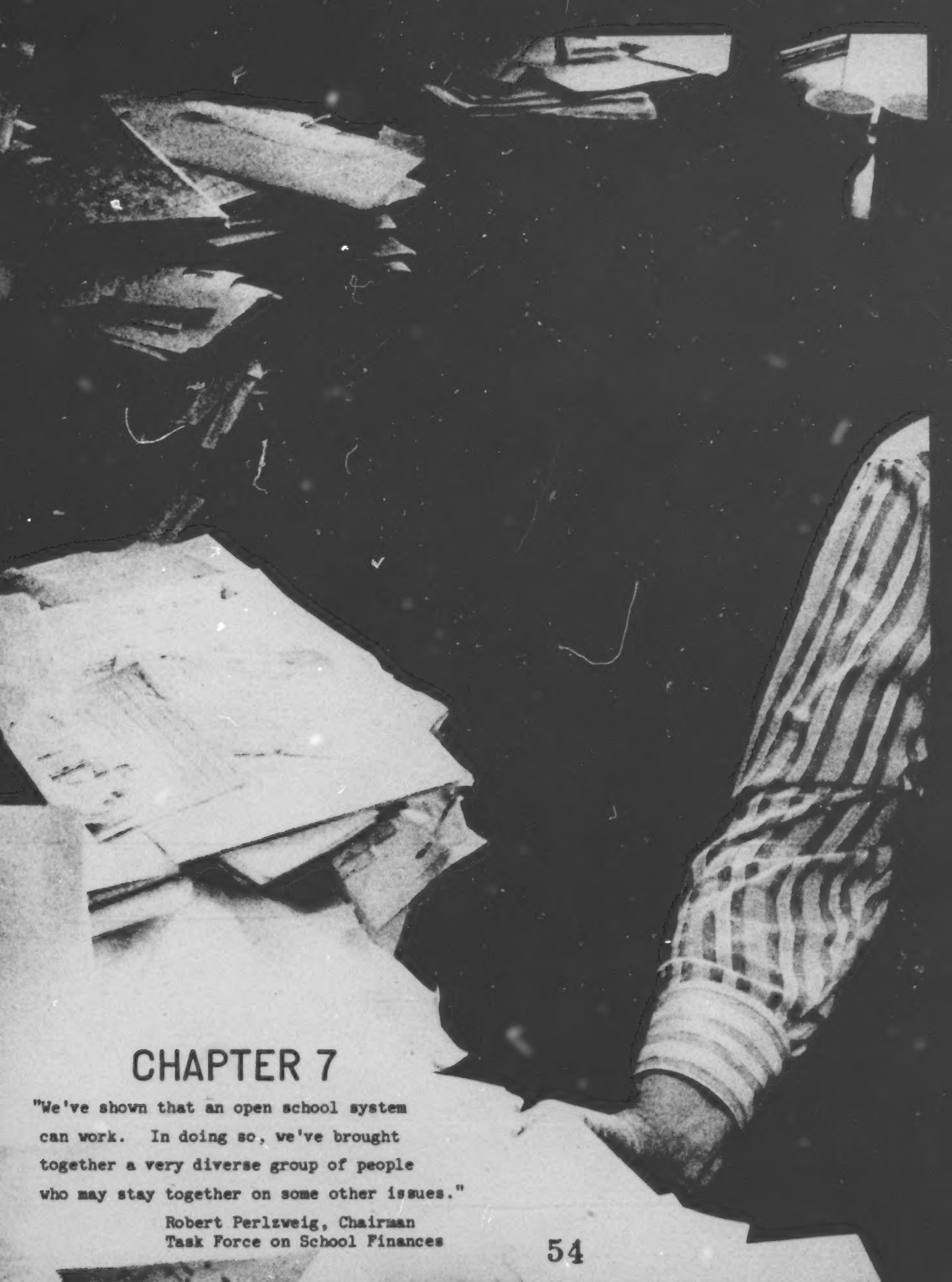
"No. Sometimes you don't vote, you get a consensus. You then present it to a larger meeting and get a consensus there too. In fact, at the large meeting for Flex-day one lady asked, 'Aren't we going to vote?' I said no, I didn't call you here to vote. I want to hear your concerns, I want to hear your suggestions. We've already decided we're going to do this. We want to work with you to make the plan work well."

Swanson had to spell it out for me. "You see, we could have had an open fight among those parents. They could have gone away hating each other because it had boiled down to a vote. That would have been damaging whether or not it

passed. Some of the conservative parents, who were most opposed to the idea, are now enthusiastic about it because of the passage of time and because we have worked together. Many who wanted a free school see this as a cop out on my part; others see the Flex-day plan as a more practical idea."

I wondered now he would get the teachers to go along with the new plan.

"The gung-ho teachers are the ones who will be offering the new courses. The more settled ones will be assigned to supervise, and work with the outside career people we bring in. I'm going to see that they do it. I'll be out on my roller skates this year watching - I will not be in my office very much, you can be sure."



CHAPTER 7

"We've shown that an open school system can work. In doing so, we've brought together a very diverse group of people who may stay together on some other issues."

Robert Perlzweig, Chairman
Task Force on School Finances

Chapter 7

Politics, Politics, Politics

In 1970, the Oakland Board of Education lost an important election in which voters were asked to raise the mill levy for school taxes. The defeat stemmed largely from the alienation of black parents. The board had ignored the black community's views about a new superintendent - had, in fact, offended it with one of its choices. Chastened by the setback, the board consulted the community and went on to select Marcus Foster.

Robert Perlzweig has observed and participated in Oakland school affairs for more than seven years. Forty-three years old, he was born in London; his father, a rabbi, moved the family to Toronto after the war. Later, Robert emigrated to the United States where he has spent most of his adult life working for Jewish organizations. At present, he is Executive Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Alameda (where Oakland is located) and Contra Costa counties. He works hard. He is a bachelor who seems to go to meetings twelve nights a week and he loves to talk - all of which make him a valuable, entertaining witness to the Oakland school scene.

Closed to the Public

"I came to Oakland in 1967," Perlzweig recalls. "I had just come from New Haven where I had participated in a difficult fight to open up the school administration there; I was very much aware of the fact that it is necessary for an administration to listen to the community. When I arrived in Oakland I was distressed when I went to the Oakland Board of Education meetings. They seemed closed off; so did the administration and the superintendent. Nobody had any impact. At about the same time, Berkeley, the neighboring school district, was

beginning a desegregation program which involved a broad range of constituencies throughout the community. This proved to be terribly important to the program's early success.

"I felt that a similar commitment to community involvement in Oakland, whether tied to a particular program or not, could also make a real difference in the schools.

"When the board began looking for a new superintendent in 1969, an expert selection committee was appointed. But the board reneged on its pledge to hire a candidate proposed by the committee and appointed someone the selection committee had never seen. Although the man did not come to Oakland in the end, all this took place just at the time that the board decided to hold a special election to raise the mill levy. It didn't want to hold the election but it had no choice - the financial situation was that bad. The measure failed for a variety of reasons, but one of them was certainly the bad feeling generated by the board's method of selecting a superintendent. By the time the millage election was over, the board itself was moving toward a community participation model. So even before Dr. Foster arrived, things began to change.

"Then the procedure for getting a new superintendent started again. The citizens made it clear to the board that the new man would have to be someone who could restore the community's confidence in the public schools, someone who would open up the system. And so Marcus Foster came to town. He wanted community involvement and the board was ready to move right with him."

Skill and Patience

Perlzweig has been co-chairman of the Coordinating Council and chairman of the Task Force on School Finances.

"I got involved for two reasons. First, I have always felt that education can be a major area of community action. Second, Master Plan was the one vehicle in the city of Oakland for influencing public policy. There was not much action at City Hall; it was a closed system the way the school system had been. We - Henry Mestre, Mayola Lewis, Ann Sprague, some of the League of Women Voters - saw Master Plan as being much wider than just the schools.

"At the beginning Master Plan was run by people like myself and Henry, people with organization skills who had the patience to go through a

whole learning process. Then the community folks came in and made some changes in the way we did business, but we stayed on the right track - supportive all the way around. After that, the skeptics began to accept us. This included the teachers' and principals' organizations and some levels of the school administration. Some, however, had seen citizens' groups come and go and felt we would also pass away. But we didn't. They learned that we were a force to be reckoned with."

Perlzweig is quite proud of the accomplishments of the Task Force on School Finances. "There were two things going. First, we agreed in the beginning that our major product would not be a report but a series of actions. If reports came out that was fine, but it was not our major objective. Second, when the recommendations appeared, we approached the board directly. Board members asked questions, but essentially they followed our advice. In the end, we developed a mutually supportive relationship."

In Perlzweig's view, the task force's most important achievement was its approved proposal for a District Budget Advisory Committee.

"In the past, the board released its proposed budget in May and citizens had only until July to question it. Now we'll have a citizens' committee making contributions all the year through. The district committee will be composed of representatives of teachers' organizations, classified employees, representatives of community organizations that have shown a special interest in the school budget. The idea is that this group of people will meet year-round with representatives of the board and the administration to develop the budget, set priorities, and then evaluate the process. They may even submit their own budget. We will have access to information from the Oakland school system and elsewhere. For example, I would hope that the California Teachers' Association would supply us with information from their excellent files. It's all a very exciting prospect, and I think it's the first time it has happened anywhere."

Perlzweig's task force is also pushing to have the board institutionalize community budgeting roles at the local school site. It has not yet submitted that proposal to the board and it may integrate it with a similar idea put forward by the Master Plan in its successful refunding request to the Rockefeller Foundation.

"The local budgeting process began under Foster," Perlzweig says. "He

encouraged principals to get the school site committees involved. But we have no mandated process."

The Budget Process

"During Foster's first year, the school administration told principals that at least one public meeting had to be held on the budget; few people, either staff or community, really knew what a budget was about. In the second year, we - the task force - couldn't get Foster to say 'you must' to the principals; again they were to be just 'encouraged.' Then our task force made a filmstrip on the budget process and went out of our way to get the cooperation of principals and teachers and regional staff in making it. In fact, the film made it clear that the principal had final authority on the school site budget. In our new proposal, we ask for a sign-off procedure which makes it possible for a local site committee to refuse to approve the budget and in effect issue a warning to the regional superintendent that something may be wrong. The budget can still go forward, but the citizens have a way of making their concerns known. If the principal doesn't accept the recommendations of the school site committee, he is obligated to inform them that he is not doing so. Until now, that hasn't been done and as a result the local committee has been left in the dark. All the way through, the proposal requires continual evaluation, reporting, and feedback between the community and school personnel. This is the key to the whole thing."

Confrontation and Accommodation

What were Perlzweig's experiences with the teachers' and principals' organizations, the school administrators and the Board of Education?

"You've got to remember we've had teachers and principals on the task forces from the beginning and they have been very helpful as individuals. Their organizations are sometimes another matter because they necessarily have their own collective agendas and priorities. For example, one time we upset the Oakland Education Association (the teachers' organization) because we didn't think that class size was a major issue. They upset us by thinking of us initially as a front for the administration. But working together broke the ice; attitudes were reversed; in fact, six months after our discussions, the OEA gave me their award for citizen leadership."

"And the principals as a group?"

"Most principals have very little experience in working with the community. The prospect of such collaboration on a local site budget committee, for example, can be perceived as a threat to their authority. When we made it clear that the principal will have the final say although the citizens can protest his decision, we were told by principals that if arrangements could be made to train them in community participation techniques, they could accept such things as local budget proposals. I think that's a very promising response."

"What about the Board of Education?"

"Well, it's gone along with us, sometimes reluctantly. We've had some interesting debates, let's put it that way. What has been important about working with vested authority groups is to spell out our fundamental objective - which is <u>not</u> community control. We don't talk community control because we don't think community control. We don't see Oakland as divided into separate geographic areas, as people did in New York City in the 60's. Like Marcus Foster himself, we think and talk about community <u>participation</u> - shared decision-making. The people calling for community control would be walloped in any election."

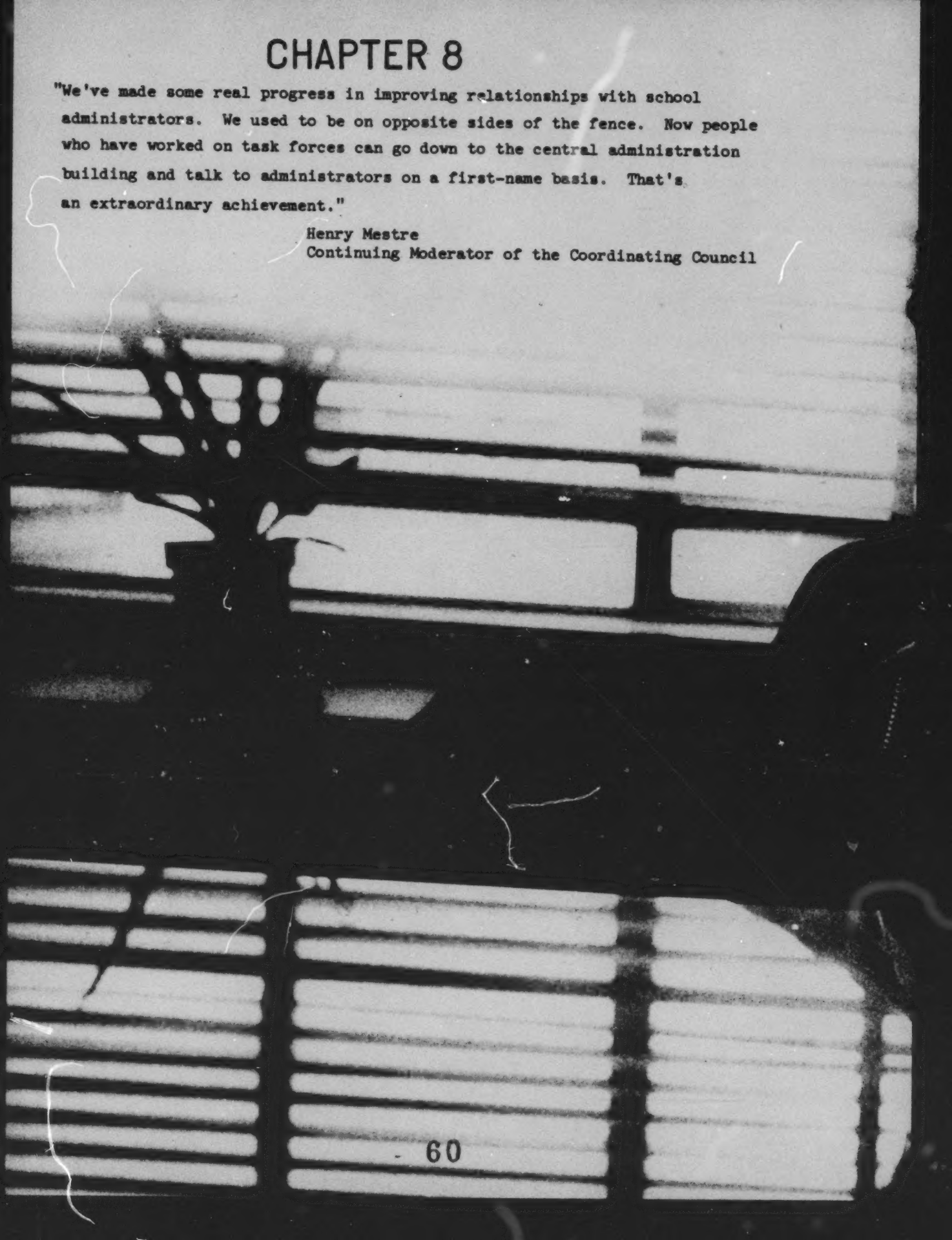
"And the community?"

"There is now a whole group of people who are knowledgeable about the process of education and they are going to stay together as an influence on the educational process," Perlzweig says. "We have shown that an open school system can work. In doing so, we've brought together a diverse group of people who may stay together on some other issues."

CHAPTER 8

"We've made some real progress in improving relationships with school administrators. We used to be on opposite sides of the fence. Now people who have worked on task forces can go down to the central administration building and talk to administrators on a first-name basis. That's an extraordinary achievement."

Henry Mestre
Continuing Moderator of the Coordinating Council



Chapter 8

Process, Process, Process

Henry Mestre, the first continuing moderator (chairman) of the Coordinating Council, says that the Rockefeller Foundation's decision in early 1973 to fund a third year for Master Plan was "a curse." Ann Sprague feels that Master Plan needs at least three years of funding to demonstrate its effectiveness to the school board. Noel Day, the consultant hired by Master Plan to provide technical assistance to the task forces, believes a foundation should think in terms of five years when it sinks money into a school system, with a cut-off if plans go awry.

Mestre, 33 years old, was deputy director of the Spanish Speaking Unity Council at the time of his involvement with Master Plan, and he is now its executive director. In addition to his responsibilities on the Coordinating Council, he was co-chairman of the Curriculum Task Force. He is articulate and perceptive, and has some provocative thoughts about Master Plan.

Why a Curse?

I asked him why he thought the Foundation's refunding decision was a curse.

"Everyone thought it was just a two-year program," Mestre said. "From the spring of 1971 to the spring of 1973. We all thought we were going to go out of business and that was the appealing aspect of Master Plan: a bunch of people get together, work hard, and then you get the school system to institutionalize what you've done and you go out of business. This sense of being finite spurred people on. Our task, as we saw it, was to develop models of participation that would change the Oakland schools. We all knew that while funds from outside were important to get us going, we had to create an environment that

would increase local commitment and, over time, enable us to move ahead without being dependent on any foundation or outside agency for funds.

"When we got word that the Rockefeller Foundation was going to give us more money, three groups emerged. Some people were opposed to the renewal, feeling that Master Plan was great because it wasn't going to be perpetuated. A second group began to look at Master Plan as a sinecure, which is natural. A third group, of which I became part, believed that since the money was coming, there should be an increased emphasis on the individual school site level. We wanted to move away from citywide activities, and toward local school site projects. You see, the task forces were stripping the local sites of leadership. This was a difficult problem because we had no intention of permitting the citywide apparatus to overpower the sites, but to some extent we couldn't avoid it. The citywide task forces (which focused on specific areas such as renovations, or finance) were more glamorous and they seemed to be more important as far as the district was concerned. The task force structure itself became something of a security blanket, a way to continually put off implementation of a program that would strengthen involvement at school sites - where most people actually participate."

"Are you saying that if you were to do this again, there should only be one term of funding and that it should go to the school sites?"

Work at the Bottom

"No. I'm saying only that after two years, at that point, that was the way to go. No, we needed the emphasis we started out with - a highly visible, highly organized, citywide activity like the Coordinating Council and the task forces - so that once and for all we could bury the idea that the school establishment is inaccessible. We made that point - we really have achieved community involvement. But as time went on, the more you worked at the top, the less you really did at the bottom. For example, one woman who dropped out of a task force told me that she had become involved in Master Plan because she'd been concerned with her kid's education. As much as she enjoyed working on her task force, she found herself getting further and further away from influencing her own child's school."

"Are you saying there is no role for task forces?"

"No, they played an important role. But although we had said the three levels - sites, task forces, and council - wouldn't be hierarchical, still it worked out that way. I'm afraid that if you again set up a citywide system, the local school sites would again take second place. You see, the system becomes concerned with its own maintenance; unfortunately the task forces were practically institutionalized as structures. But what we had wanted to institutionalize was the idea of shared decision-making, not the forms that idea took. Once the task forces accomplished their original objective, they looked around for things to do. They became task forces in search of objectives.

"All right, we've had two phases so far. The citywide emphasis in the first, the school site concentration in the second. And the third phase, whether supported or not supported by a foundation, is institutionalization."

A Mechanism for Change

I asked Mestre how he felt about the proposed third phase for Oakland, in which the principals will be the major agents for increasing community participation. Did he feel principals would want to promote change?

"You have to understand how much we have changed these past few years. While we understood a long time ago that principals could well hold the key to our long-term success or failure, we had a hard time figuring out how to deal with them. You must realize that we were engaging in a learning process. We were a bunch of community people, not school administrators. We had control of the Foundation grant and the district challenged us to come up with our own approach to opening up all levels of the system. In that sense we had an incredible amount of power and influence - if we used it right. We had to discover the right formula for ourselves. At first we offered the principals a carrot - the Site Committee Assistance Project - one way of encouraging principals to move with us into some new relationships. And we were surprised at how successful we were - principals really responded to our initiative. I can remember one principal who drove me up the wall. Before the Site Committee Assistance Project even began, he gave me six proposals developed by parents, students, teachers, and staff at his school. Before that he hadn't been enthusiastic about Master Plan. But he saw the project as an opportunity to improve the school. That was exactly what we wanted to happen,

because it automatically created more supportive staff-community relationships.

"So our current proposal before the Foundation is a logical next step. What we intend to do is make certain that the principals receive the technical backup they need to enter into the kind of decision-sharing we want to have in our schools. Four years ago I don't think that we, as a community group, were prepared to make this kind of commitment to the system. Now we see it as imperative - an indication of our own growth and of the district's respect for what we have been doing.

"What we are trying to say about public education is quite straightforward. People don't come down to the Board of Education unless problems get out of hand. The search for solutions has to focus on the local school. People have got to feel that they can walk into their own school and get something done - whether it's a philosophical issue, or an effort to get a new program going, or a problem of low water pressure affecting the drinking fountains."

Relationships

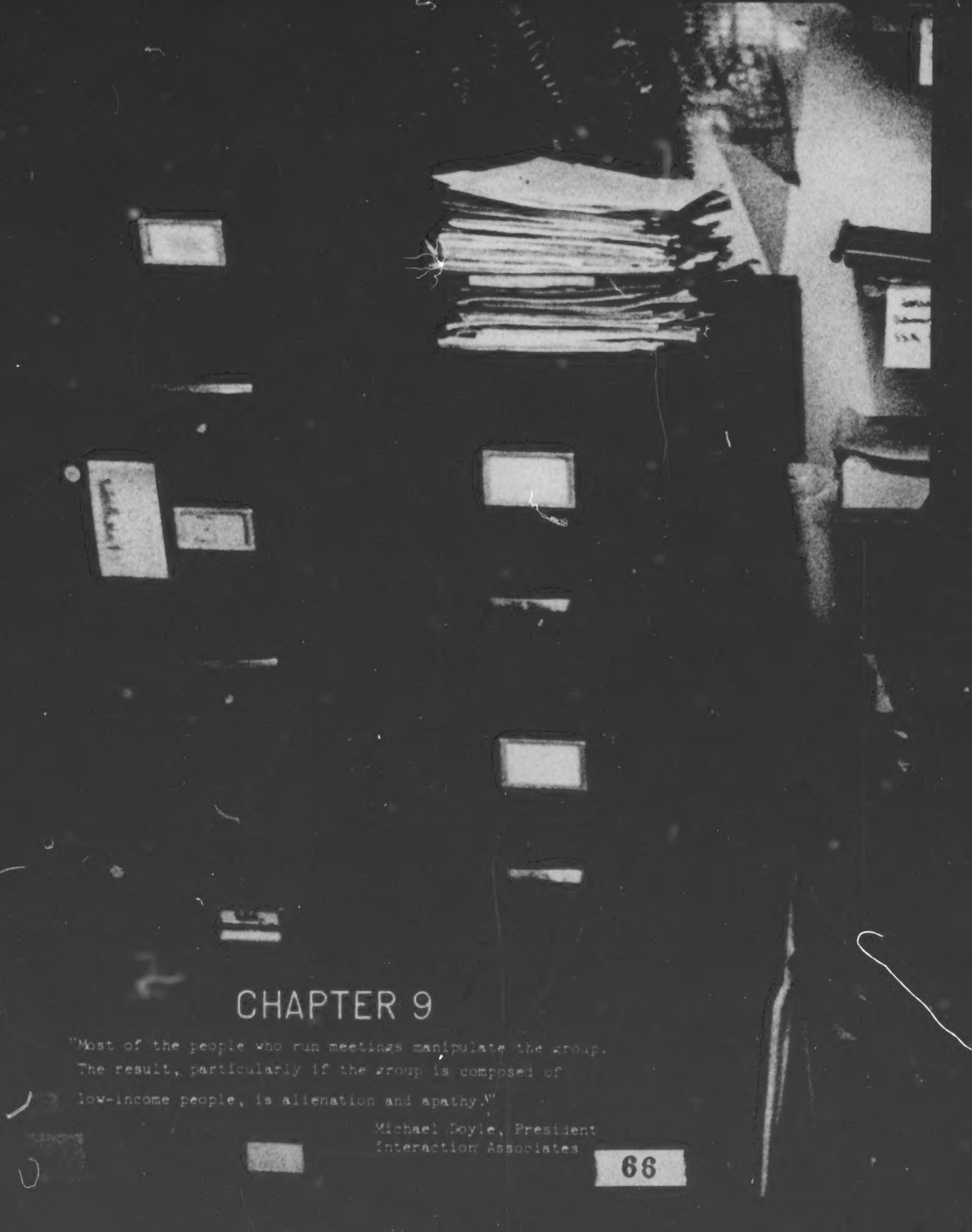
"I feel that the degree to which we are able to change the relationships - among ourselves and between us and the system - is a good measure of our success. And here we get mixed grades. For my own part I have changed a great deal. When I came to Master Plan, like many other community representatives, I had a very narrow focus - the special needs of children from the Spanish-speaking community. But over time that began to change, as I recognized that if we were to bring about long-term change in the schools, all of us, from whichever group we came, had to recognize that we had some overriding objectives. And that's what began to happen. At some point we started to set aside our parochial interests, understand that we had to have a broader perspective, and think about everybody's children. The new relationships we have forged will probably change the schools forever.

"We've made some real progress in improving relationships with school administrators. We used to be on opposite sides of the fence. Now people who have worked on task forces can go down to the central administration building and talk to administrators on a first-name basis. That's an extraordinary achievement in itself. We haven't been quite as

successful with the board. Unfortunately, I think that both we and they have always felt a degree of uneasiness. After all, here were a bunch of community folks proposing rather fundamental changes in the school; it may have seemed to the board that we were functioning as a loyal opposition, although we really didn't want it to be that way."

"Still, things obviously weren't so bad. The board seems to go along with a lot of what you proposed, whether reluctantly or not."

"I don't think the board lacks commitment," Mestre said. "I just think that often they didn't appreciate who we were, which could have been as much our fault as theirs. If we had had good communication, who knows what else we might have accomplished? When you're at an informal level you can exchange views without feeling threatened or defensive. I wish we had reached that level with the board. If we had - and it still could happen - we would have done something unheard of in big-city board and community relations."



CHAPTER 9

"Most of the people who run meetings manipulate the group. The result, particularly if the group is composed of low-income people, is alienation and apathy."

Michael Doyle, President
Interaction Associates

Chapter 9

Teaching Leadership: Can You Do It?

In 1968 the Rockefeller Foundation decided to concentrate, in its Equal Opportunity program, on leadership development and school-community projects. From the beginning it saw the two areas as related. Clearly, leaders were necessary if the structure for community participation was to grow. And just as clearly, the men and women who would become leaders in school programs would also participate in other aspects of community life.

This second objective of the RF program emphasized the shift in educational reform that occurred toward the end of the decade. Compensatory education, a component of the "Great Society," had emphasized such improvements in the schools as new and innovative teaching methods and materials. These strenuous efforts to improve the performance of low-income black children were later judged to be largely a failure. That judgment, accurate or not, sparked a new perception: it wasn't enough to improve the schools if you ignored the homes and the community from which the children came. If foundations and government were to make some headway against poverty and prejudice, they must try to get the community - parents and others - involved in the process of education.

Roots of Alienation

The Rockefeller Foundation felt that the absence of leadership, indeed the disheartening lack of social organization in the ghetto, was at the root of the alienation and disorder that complicated poor people's lives. These destructive forces (translated into high absenteeism and dropout rates, indifference and hostility toward the schools by parents and students, and a spotty awareness of the importance of education) were considered

to be at least partly to blame for the problems poor children have in school. In the life outside school, the daily burden of powerlessness appeared to be directly related to cynicism, crime rates, and psychological isolation. These observations persuaded the Foundation to develop leadership training programs wherever it could; the Oakland Master Plan represents its most ambitious effort so far.

The leadership development component was the most important element of Master Plan - more significant than its task forces, site committees, and Coordinating Council because leaders would outlive immediate projects. The Master Plan leadership program, given the lumpy name of the Site Committee Assistance Project, had two phases. In the first, Master Plan hired consultants to teach people at the local school sites (parents, teachers, principals, and students) certain skills which would permit them to control a situation - specifically, the techniques of conducting a meeting. In the second phase, it gave those four interest groups the opportunity to develop new programs at their school. These included varied curriculum reforms such as we've seen at Thornhill Elementary School (where Ann Sprague was the site committee chairman), and McChesney Junior High School (where math teacher Barbara Sergeant and principal Edna Brewer worked) and Skyline High School (where Mrs. Sprague and principal David Swanson occasionally tangled). Other innovations that we will look at involve the use of parents and students as teachers (which occurred respectively at Howard Elementary School and Madison Junior High), and the entire reorganization of a school's life (Peralta Elementary School).

How are these activities financed? Master Plan paid for consultants who taught the techniques of running a meeting. And to attract people to meetings, Master Plan gave each of the 91 schools a $250 mini-fund which could be used for babysitters, transportation, and postage. It also made funds available when a local committee wanted to demonstrate an innovative educational concept.

Group Manipulation

Mike Doyle figures there are 11 million meetings a day in the United States. That means 11 million chances a day to practice democracy or, as Doyle sees it, autocracy. "Most of the people who run meetings manipulate the group. The result, particularly if the group is composed of low-income people, is alienation and apathy."

This is what Master Plan was determined to avoid. Early on, it realized that "simply bringing together a group of people, even if they have a great deal in common, does not by itself lead to constructive communication." And it also knew that when people got together without a workable meeting structure the likely result would be "frustration, anger and confrontation." Because of manipulative leadership, or the lack of any leadership, people - if past experience was any measure - would leave meetings with a sense of emptiness, promising themselves they would never attend another meeting again, yet always finding themselves at another one. "For the fact is that people cannot work together without meeting together; yet, meetings must be effective if the public is to continue to participate."

The meeting - a device to get parents, teachers, principals, and students together - was the main artery of the Master Plan process. If obstructions were allowed to develop, the life of the plan would be jeopardized. So the problem was how to make meetings more effective. Master Plan went looking for help, got bids from 25 consultants and selected a San Francisco consulting firm, Interaction Associates, whose president was Mike Doyle. He saw Master Plan as both an outsider and an insider. His objective was to teach technique.

Three Roles

"When I got involved, Master Plan's biggest problem was saying how do we get people out for meetings," Doyle recalled. "I said that's not the problem; it's what are they going to do when they get there. The Master Plan meetings I saw were not particularly inspiring. The chairpeople were only concerned about having power, saying 'Gee, I worked my butt off and here's my reward.' The philosophy that I presented was this: you can't train leaders outside of their own groups. We tried to train the group rather than the individual. In other words, at any time, any individual in a group could run a meeting."

Doyle and his associates concentrated on teaching the new techniques to local site committees. "There were three roles: the facilitator, the recorder, and the group. The facilitator concentrates on the process of running the meeting; he isn't allowed to influence content. What he asks is, what are we doing right now, which problem do we want to solve first, what do we want to get done tonight?

"The recorder puts down everything the group does. He or she uses various

colored magic markers to write each event on butcher paper, using key words to log every idea that has been discussed. This serves several purposes. Most important, it reminds people of what has been covered; it creates a group memory of ideas that might otherwise be forgotten. Second, when an unsophisticated person sees his idea up on that paper alongside a smarty's, he feels he is as important to the meeting as that smart guy.

"The group also has a role. We say to people, if the recorder doesn't get down what you say, correct him. And if the facilitator starts to manipulate the meeting, kick him out or tell him to get back into his role."

Role Reversal

Doyle and company trained thirty people at a time, in two-hour sessions over a four-week period. "We'd get together group A and group B, each consisting of fifteen people. Group A would choose a facilitator and a recorder, pick a problem to solve and start working on it. We'd say to group B, watch this and tell us what you learn. Then we would reverse roles. The thing that worked best in the training program was the testimonial period. We'd say to them at the first session, the only way you are going to learn this stuff is to go out and try it out somewhere this week; don't wait until the end of the program. Then at the second meeting we'd have a fifteen-minute testimonial period; everybody would get up and testify about how they'd used the technique.

"Another thing we found is that the kids picked up on these skills. The old people and the young people really didn't care about getting power. They became great facilitators."

The Wrong People?

The community liaisons ran the training sessions and then they recruited new people to meetings. Some even got principals to join in. One community liaison, Mrs. Esther Hemphill, recalls a principal "who was so shy and bashful that it was uncomfortable to be around him. At first, I was treated as though I didn't belong in his school. I urged him to attend the training sessions. After awhile he came and participated; he admitted he was shy and didn't feel comfortable with parents. Now he is a different man. He will attend any area conference he's invited to and take an active part."

While Doyle claims some successes in training the local site committees,

he is not reluctant to point out some failures. "For one thing, we would often end up training individual leaders instead of groups, which was contrary to our original purpose. And in addition, we often trained the wrong people. The people who showed up at training sessions weren't always the leaders of the local site committees. If I were doing it again, I would try to train an entire site committee at one time instead of various individuals from various site committees. The third failure was the fact that we didn't get enough principals. They felt uncomfortable with the Master Plan concept and tended to undercut the site committees."

Criticism

The ability to conduct or participate in a meeting is unquestionably a valuable skill for a leader (or a follower) but it certainly doesn't come close to the essence of leadership. Elliott Medrich says he never thought of Doyle's technique as leadership training, that if others did it was only a form of shorthand. Still, Doyle implies his program develops leaders and this was how it was perceived by many Master Plan participants - at least those on the site committees. Nonetheless, the chairpeople of the Coordinating Council who happened to be full-time organizers in their professional lives weren't all that happy with the Doyle methods.

Henry Mestre says, "The techniques didn't do very much. They're fantastically good at loosening up a group that already knows how to use a tight, rigid kind of meeting process. It's also fine for airing things out. We did try his methods occasionally in the council; they help people get a lot of things out of their system and enable them to walk away happy. But they don't help people reach a decision. They also can mislead the unsophisticated. People can become fanatic about it; they see forms and mistake them for the substance."

What is a Leader?

"But my real criticism about the training methods is that I don't believe you can teach leadership techniques on a broad scale. We tried to do that in the Spanish Speaking Unity Council and we failed. Then we realized what a leader is - how he or she develops. A leader is somebody who can pick up a phone and get something done. It's a matter of having conscious values, a philosophical perspective, a sense of where you're going. You don't get this in a two-hour training session. You get it by having one-to-one relationships as we did in

the Spanish community. Each of us had a mentor and somebody to train. The object was to learn how to lead, not just control people. Before we realized that, we had just two people in the Spanish-speaking community who could be called leaders. Now we've got fifty."

Robert Perlzweig, the other professional organizer on the council, is also skeptical about the Doyle technique. "In the first place, the process bolts people together to reach a kind of consensus, but that doesn't comprise leadership. Second, there's a question of whether group, as opposed to individual, leadership (which Doyle claims is his objective) isn't a contradiction in terms."

Mutual Feelings

Doyle is no more appreciative of the two professional organizers, whom he calls "manipulators." "We had an ongoing battle with the council the whole time. They were saying, train the school sites to be more participatory but not us. I'd say no, you guys have to model the process. If you don't run good meetings, if you're not open, you're setting a bad example. Well, they never did set up any procedures, so as a result the task forces weren't coordinated. The Coordinating Council was a group that sat around and talked to itself. It had very little power and very little control, and because it was unstructured, it was easy pickings for the maumaus. They couldn't coordinate anything, including themselves."

So while the Doyle techniques took on the lower body politic, they were rejected by the higher, the Coordinating Council. Doyle believes that if the council had used them, it would have avoided a bitter fight over the community liaisons' request for more pay and full-time jobs. That struggle crippled the council for nine months in 1973. It is useful to consider the incident because it may shed some light on the skills and values of Master Plan participants and because it reveals the tensions of a community project which brings together diverse interest groups - a coming together that Oakland had never known before that time.

CHAPTER 10

"All the liaisons were doing was making sure the successful stayed successful. So I reversed their priorities. They had to spend most of their time and effort in the schools where they had failed the worst."

Elliott Medrich, Administrative Assistant
Oakland Public Schools

Chapter 10

The Struggle

In the beginning the Coordinating Council, preferring as little structure as possible, did not even want a permanent chairman. This limitation, so the logic went, would place the council in a "coordinating" rather than a "leadership" role. In fact, it used the word moderator rather than chairman because the former designation seemed more democratic. Two of the three candidates for the position were Henry Mestre and Robert Perlzweig. When Mestre was elected he persuaded the council to let the two others serve with him on a steering committee so that he could have their help in conducting meetings.

"The council got along pretty well until Elliott's replacement, Sally Kendall, left in the summer of 1973," Mestre recalls. "When she left we had no staff, and it became a monumental task to prepare for meetings. You know, all of us have full-time jobs and it became very difficult to find the time to prepare for a meeting. The executive secretary for Master Plan, Mary Pantoja, managed to stay on top of the paper work, but still we had a hard time preparing for meetings.

"Nonetheless, we remained committed to a low visibility, minimal structure model. In part this contributed to our problems.

"The majority was opposed to any kind of procedures, whether Roberts Rules or group-process methods. Bob Blackburn and Elliott Medrich didn't want bylaws; they felt they would make the council too structured. Bob would talk about "the edifice complex" - how institutions that are ready to die decide to build something. All we had was an unwritten, accepted set of ways to run the meetings. We needed something written down. Without that, we could be mau-maued - and that is just

precisely what happened when the liaisons asked for more money."

The occasion of the liaisons' fight for full-time jobs and additional money was the decision by the Rockefeller Foundation to give Master Plan additional funds. The first grant, of $175,000, ran from December 1971 to June 1973. In February 1973, the council learned that the Foundation would make another grant, of $225,000, for the period from April 1973 to June 30, 1974.

In the first year of Master Plan, the community liaisons had worked some four hours a day for a $3,000 salary. When the council learned of the Foundation's second grant, it decided to use the funds in a way that would shift the emphasis from the task forces to the local school sites. And so it earmarked a sum of money for the Site Committee Assistance Project. The council told the liaisons that their salaries would come out of that money but the amounts were not specified. The liaisons felt that their jobs were being threatened by the ambiguity.

The struggle which ensued posed some difficult problems for the Coordinating Council. It should be noted that the relatively non-directive structure of the council meant that the various task forces continued to operate undisturbed, and for the most part unaware of the salary conflict. But the dispute suggested at least three problems implicit in the council's orientation.

Accountable to Nobody

The first problem was the fact that the liaisons weren't accountable to anyone, an ironic wrinkle in a community effort which was supposed to make the school system more accountable. Mestre says that "the biggest problem with the liaisons was that they were hired by one institution - community panels in high school attendance areas - and supervised by another authority, Master Plan's staff coordinator. When we, the council, got into a bind with them, the liaisons rejected our involvement. We were hired by the community, they said. Well, the original selection panels of the 'community' had gone out of business so the liaisons were really accountable to nobody.

"This lack of accountability created some difficult problems. First, the liaisons didn't have very well defined jobs. Beyond a general statement of duties, each liaison invented his or her own job description. Some did an excellent job, some did not. But here too, a good part of the fault lay in the system. Because the council had no staff

after Sally Kendall left, every time something came up we said, okay, we'll have the liaisons take care of that. This made them and us dissatisfied. Second, it wasn't only the liaisons who didn't know what they were supposed to do - we, on the council, didn't know what to expect of them. We had no way to evaluate what they were doing. Third, we didn't even know what they were doing because it wasn't until Elliott returned that they were asked to write monthly reports about their activities." When Medrich got back from Europe and returned to his job with Master Plan, he found he was reading the same kinds of reports from liaisons that they had given him before he left. "All the liaisons were doing," he says, "was making sure the successful stayed successful. So I reversed their priorities. They had to spend most of their time and effort in schools where they had failed the worst."

Blurring the Issue

But in Medrich's absence the Coordinating Council had developed a great distrust for the liaisons. "We would hear," says Mestre "that some schools hadn't seen their liaisons for months. The controversy about salaries was really based on lack of trust." As another council member put it, the lack of trust led many people to view the liaisons' requests only in terms of greed.

"When the new funds came, some of the white liberals on the council proposed that we dump the liaisons. But they handled it badly and they clearly did not have enough votes to fire them. Instead, their strategy was to make the whole issue blurry. So they put a lump sum into the school site program, out of which the liaisons' salaries were supposed to come, but those salaries weren't earmarked. This was in contrast to the salaries of Sally Kendall and Mary Pantoja; their salaries were spelled out. They happened to be white and this only heightened the racial tensions."

So race was the second factor complicating the dispute. "The only blacks on the Coordinating Council were the liaisons and three community leaders, in a body of 22 people, in a city whose school district is 60 percent black. And who had chosen the Coordinating Council? Each of the task forces. And the task forces were chosen by the people who were coming to meetings. It really came down to this: the white liberals feeling ripped off by the blacks and the black liaisons feeling they were really worth more money because they in fact

legitimatized a process in which there was little black participation. The liaisons represented school site participants more than citywide activists. Since we argued that the essence of our work was site based, that made their work that much more important."

The Line-up

The racial tensions put pressure on the council, leading it to a well-meaning but misguided procedural decision which became a third complication. Some time before, the council had made the liaisons voting members when it invited them to participate in the selection of a coordinator (with whom they themselves would work). Soon, however, they were voting on other issues, including their own pay - an "absolutely insane arrangement," according to one council member.

This then was the extraordinarily complex background for the events that followed. Much simpler was the line-up: it was four liaisons (Mayola Lewis and Kay Cuclis, Ann Sprague's predecessor, stayed out of the dispute), a minority of council members, and some representatives from the community fighting for higher pay for the liaisons against a faction, though not a majority on the council, that wanted to dismiss the liaisons altogether.

"The meetings were pretty hairy," one council member recalls. "None of us had much knowledge about how to run community meetings and we allowed ourselves to be railroaded. One problem was a tremendous guilt feeling on the part of the council's white majority toward the black liaisons and the black community. I think this explains some of the difficulties that Sally Kendall faced."

"There is no way I can say something to a black person the way I say it to a white," is the way Bob Perlzweig put it.

How was the dispute resolved? Mestre and Perlzweig argued for a compromise. Mestre said, "If we had to give them a salary increase, so be it. We couldn't spend five months arguing about the difference. We went down and settled it with the liaisons in an amicable fashion, after shutting off talk about having them fired."

And so the liaisons kept their jobs; and their pay went from $3,000 for part-time work to $6,500 for full-time service.

We're Conservative...

What are we to make of all this? Mike Doyle and Henry Mestre would agree that the Coordinating Council's failure to approve basic procedures for the conduct of its meetings made it an easy

victim. They differ, however, on what procedures would have been appropriate. Doyle favors the open approach of his group process, which Mestre says the council tried without success. Mestre supports the more directed style of traditionalists in running a meeting.

"You see, the Spanish-speaking and black communities are conservative," Mestre says. "We believe that there have to be some hierarchical relationships to sustain a broadly based group like this.

"Does the white community have absolutely open, absolutely democratic organizations? If they did, they would never get anything done. Yet minority communities are told to subscribe to those tenets; we are expected to organize for the war on poverty with everybody invited, discussions ranging all over the map, and leaders elected from those who shouted the loudest."

Tighter procedures, including an accountability mechanism for the liaisons, would have helped the council. But community panels representing groups that are strange to each other require not only tight procedures and accountability devices; they also need some basic psychological orientation. The struggle in the council indicates that Master Plan did not sufficiently prepare its participants to deal with the two difficulties that plague community activities in our time - white guilt, and actual or perceived black greed. Neither the group-process techniques nor any other activity in Master Plan confronted these phenomena.

Ripping Off?

Somewhere along the line, it seems to me, the school-community programs of the future will have to build in mechanisms that teach whites to face their own guilt feelings with detachment when they are working with blacks.

The issue of demonstrated or apparent black avarice is more complicated. There seems to be little doubt that at least one of the liaisons was an unembarrassable rip-off artist who had an easy time exploiting guilty whites before and after accountability procedures had been established. But it is the fear rather than the fact of black exploitation that seems to be the heart of the matter. The apprehension usually arises when middle-income whites and low-income blacks quarrel over the purpose of a community participation program like Master Plan. Is its purpose seminal and long-range to "train leaders" and "improve the quality of education" - or is its aim practical and immediate - jobs?

To put it another way: should poor people work for nothing or only for symbolic pay in high purpose, self-help programs? Or should they work for a realistic salary, even if they or their families are better off economically than many other families? These are provocative but irrelevant considerations, questions of economic realities and social attitudes which Master Plan was not designed to explore. But Master Plans of the future will have to explore such value questions.

Lessons Learned

What about the struggle itself? We have seen it enacted hundreds of times around the country in the last decade; it is inevitable when any ambitious plan tries to bring disparate elements of the community together for the first time.

More to the point, the dispute didn't wreck Master Plan. The liaisons got a decent salary and Medrich got them to follow some accountability procedures; the Coordinating Council tightened up the conduct of its meetings; and the council perhaps saw the conflict as one more reason to institutionalize participation in the schools - to insure that a communication could be maintained among diverse elements of the community.

CHAPTER II

"We wanted to create a quality school, so when you get up in the morning you don't have to push the kids out the door."

Walter Miles, parent
Peralta Elementary School

Chapter 11

And the Achievement: A New Leader, One Dude, and the Reason Why

Foster, Blackburn, Medrich, Sprague, Lewis, Sergeant, Brewer, Swanson, Perlzweig, Mestre - they all had one thing in common. They had made it before the coming of Master Plan. They were established leaders and movers who could pick up a phone and get something done. Their skills made the birth of Master Plan possible; without their experience, it would most likely have collapsed, thus discrediting any future attempts to reform the educational establishment in Oakland.

New Leaders

But a major objective of Master Plan was not the use of established leaders but the development of new ones in the left-out black, white, and Asian communities who could operate both within and beyond the school establishment. Mike Doyle's techniques taught people one element of leadership - the know-how of running a meeting. But the making of a leader involved something more. What had to be provided was the opportunity to challenge people's talents and then trust that in confronting that challenge they would rise to the occasion - becoming something more than, and something quite different from, what they were before.

And so we come to Walter Miles. Miles is 43 years old, black, a jack of several trades - one of the people Whitman sang about. "I do a lot of things to make a dollar," he says. "I have a clock-punching job like every other average citizen; I'm a senior parts technician for a trucking concern. On the side, I buy and sell real estate."

He also likes to deal with children. He has several of his own, one of whom attends Peralta Elementary School which

is in North Oakland, near the Berkeley line.

In 1971 Miles "came out of nowhere," as Blackburn puts it, to become chairman of Peralta's Master Plan site committee. He arrived at a critical time. The Board of Education wanted to close Peralta because it was losing enrollment. While the school was located in an area that was 50 percent white, 50 percent black, the whites were taking their children out of the school and sending them to other schools - private, parochial, or public - in Oakland and Berkeley. As a result, the school population had become 90 percent black.

"One reason why the whites were taking their children out was the constant changeover of principals and teachers in the school," Miles says. "It seemed to me the school was just a training ground for principals and teachers. They came and stayed for a while and then moved on. This made for an ordinary school. And with the whites leaving, it got worse. We needed to come up with an idea to reverse the deterioration, to get the whites to come back, to increase enrollment. We wanted to keep our neighborhood school open so we started looking around for ideas that would make it an outstanding school, one that would attract students to it."

Miles had been following Foster's activities. "When Foster initiated Master Plan, it was exciting. Not like the PTA which really didn't do all that much. You go to a PTA meeting and you talk about potlucks - raising money for pencils and paper. This has nothing to do with education, which was deteriorating at Peralta."

A New Man

So the new chairman of the Peralta site committee, a man unknown to the school bureaucracy, began to look for alternatives.

I asked Miles how he would define a good education?

"There is more to education than academics," he said. "We want well-rounded children who can communicate and relate to one another. This is tough for elementary schools to do. It goes deeper than improving self-image."

The 45/15 Plan

What was the idea that Miles and his committee came up with to save Peralta?

"The year-round school. In this school, the child goes to classes nine weeks or 45 days and is out three weeks or 15 days. First of all, we felt the usual three-month vacation is a loss of

learning. It takes a teacher that long to get the child back in the process. You go away from your job for three months and you return maybe a little rusty. If you take a child, kindergarten through the 6th grade, out for three months, he's forgotten what he's already learned. This goes for all kids, black and white."

"Where did you get the idea?"

"We read up and we visited schools. When we decided on the year-round concept, we sent our principal to a year-round school conference to decide which particular calendar would fit our school best. When she came back - this was February 1972 - we knew the 45/15 plan was the one we were looking for. The only other place I know which has this particular concept is Prairie View, Illinois."

"Why did you think the 45/15 schedule was the best?"

"It fits our urban scene better than a year-round schedule, the compulsory four quarters where the school is open ten weeks and closed four weeks. Ours is open all year. We have four cycles, A, B, C, and D. Three cycles are in school at a time; one is always out. Each cycle is nine weeks, with kids from each grade in each cycle. The children and their families decide which cycle is best for them. You see, our people are working people. Both husband and wife work. Their vacation doesn't always fall in the summer, but throughout the year. They would say, 'I'd like to be in D cycle because my vacation falls in December.'

"We also did something special with those 15 vacation days. We call it "intersession" and we say it has a "now" curriculum. The kids are on vacation; they don't have to come unless they want to. But if they do attend, they can come morning or afternoon, and learn anything they're interested in. They can go down to the courthouse to see how the court works and then come back and talk about it. They can learn to build a house, tend a garden, do artistic work. If anything really good happens in the "now" curriculum, we ease it into the regular curriculum. This three-week period is important. It gives the kids something extra."

It's More than Just Changing the Calendar

But Miles and company did not stop there.

"We couldn't just go in and change the calendar. We had to change the process of learning. And so we came up with individualized instruction. We

visited other school districts and chose what we felt would fit our needs."

The conceptualization of reform is only part of the story. The way Miles and others went about the difficult business of persuading the community to accept reform is the real drama.

"We felt we needed to get overwhelming community support for the plan if the board was going to accept it and let us keep the school open," Miles says. "We had two different organizations at the school site at that time - PTA and Master Plan. We set up a joint board which met once a month with both Master Plan and PTA under an umbrella to reduce the friction. Then a parent advisory group from Title One came along and we put them under the umbrella. We used all the resources we had, all the three groups, and went out to the parents by mail, phones, and home visits.

"We had Master Plan monies for the mailings and we knew we could get other Master Plan funds for the new program, if the community went for it. I sent out a ballot sheet to all parents in the school, explaining the new concept and asking them to vote on it. Of the 65 percent who voted, over two-thirds voted no.

"We now looked to see what we had done wrong. We moved from telephoning to letters, explaining what we were going to do. We couldn't lose another ballot. We set up block parties and teas. We were building up our vote. We needed this vote to persuade the board. We had to have a two-thirds majority. We did this for three months in the spring of 1972, wanting to start the program the following September.

"These techniques weren't getting us the response we wanted. Now there was only one alternative left. We would have to go into the home of each parent whose kids would be in school the following year. We had 167 families to visit - kindergarten through sixth grade. We sent out pairs of parents, one white, one black, one male, one female. We had ten pairs to explain the process. We sent out a letter first and called ahead of time to make the appointments. This took us thirty days. The knocking on doors took ten days. Some parents didn't want to vote for religious reasons. They were Jehovah's Witnesses.

"We now had a two-week waiting period before the election. After we walked out of the homes, we figured we had 60 percent with us, 40 percent against. We worked on that 40 percent, not just their votes but their involvement. We wanted them to understand the program. On election day, in June 1972,

we offered to drive parents to school to vote and we took the ballot to parents who were sick and couldn't go out. It was one vote per family because if the mother and father had a vote each and one voted yes and one voted no, it would be meaningless."

"What was the count?"

"We had 79 percent yes, 19 percent no, and 2 percent void. Ninety-six percent voted. It took until February 1973 to get the proposal to the board. We needed some time to work it out and it also took awhile for the board to get it to us. But our plan was approved and we started in July 1973, exactly a year ago."

"What's been the response of the teachers to the new calendar? They can't get their three-month vacation."

"No, no three-month vacation, but the teachers' response has been good. We told the teachers; they knew that they could transfer if they wanted to. Of the teachers who were here at that time, only one transferred and that was for personal, not policy reasons."

The Year in Review

"What can you say after one year?"

"It's been an interesting year. We lost our principal, the white woman who helped us work out the new program. She left because of fatigue. We were without a principal from September to February. A senior teacher helped run things until we got a new principal. We also had to rely on the parents. The site committee was more black than white, but the members holding office within Master Plan and PTA were half and half. We got some money from Master Plan for in-service training for the teachers who wanted to learn individualized instruction.

"So we went along for a while without a principal and this caused some discipline problems. You know, when the cat's away.... We got a principal from the Oakland district, Mrs. Barbara Craig. She's white. We interviewed seven candidates and proposed three names to the Superintendent. Blackburn then chose Craig."

"Are the white students coming back?"

"Yes. And we're getting kids not only from the neighborhood, but from all over."

"How do the children feel about it?"

"They like it, the new calendar, intersession, the individualized instruction - not everybody is reading on the same page. We wanted to create a quality school, so when you get up in the morning you don't have to push the kids out the door. We think we have done that,

but we're not satisfied. We're back looking at our program, evaluating it. We want to know why students left our school last year. Was it because they moved from the city, or did they have transportation problems?

"We had too many problems this past year to expect too much academically. But this year, 1974-75, is the turning point. We're really going to look for academic results. We're getting parent participation now. Thank God for Master Plan. Without that participation we'd be in trouble. We'd have no school. If parents and teachers don't communicate, you're in trouble."

"Can you operate without the special funds now? Do you need more foundation help?"

"The process is going but there are areas where we do need funds. Within our area we want to be self-sufficient. What we need is money to develop our new ideas as they come along. We don't need a whole bundle of money. After we finish our evaluation we are going to make a proposal to the board. We want to do some deeper things in individualized instruction.

"Have the parents grown? Sure they have. We deal with the issues. We don't hold anything back and if something hurts, too bad."

"How do you plan for the day when people tire of being on a committee?"

"You have to continually bring in new people...continually groom people for leadership roles as you go. You've got to look ahead. You must think, 'What happens when I'm gone - when my children are out of here?' You see," Miles remembered suddenly, "we've got plans to do this with a junior high school by 1975 and with the high school by 1976...."

What Walter Miles is saying is that he's going to be around for a while.

* * * *

The Pay-Off is the Kid

All the committees, all the talk, all the quarreling, all the new teaching methods, all the leadership development programs have meaning only in terms of their contribution to the ultimate objective: making it possible for a child to grow as fully as possible.

When I got to Oakland, I began looking for Melvin Jermon. I did not know his name when I arrived but I was sure I would recognize him, given the right opportunity. To visit a school system in July is not a convenient time to meet school children. Still, I had a chance to meet Melvin and some other kids.

One was Brian Richardson. As a 9th grader in the all-black Madison Junior High School in the 1973-74 school year, Brian taught math classes to the 7th graders. He and 39 other 9th graders in the Oakland-Berkeley area were trained to become "peer teachers" in a program developed by the University of California, Berkeley. The experiment is called Educational Alternatives Through Peer Teaching Program (APT). The May 1974 Master Plan proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation indicates that Master Plan monies have helped subsidize the program. B. F. Wells III, a professional mathematician hired by APT for student training, says that the National Institute of Education and the National Science Foundation have assumed the program's costs to date and that Master Plan will start underwriting the program in the 1974-75 school year. Whether or not Master Plan has or will fund the peer teaching program doesn't really matter. What is important is what happens when a school system like Oakland's, feeling democratic pressures like Master Plan, opens up.

"The kids do like it," Brian told me. "Even those who usually don't participate." He was talking about the children taught by the peer teachers. "Teachers like seeing the students participate and get involved. Principals like it. My studies don't suffer. Now I want to be a math teacher. Mr. Wells taught me how to do it. He taught me after school for about two weeks. They are going to try to let me come back to junior high school next year to teach again. This teaching helped me decide what I want to be; it helped me to see the teachers' problems. I got $3.00 an hour for two hours of teaching, two days a week. One dude named Melvin Jermon, who did have some problems in school, made an excellent teacher, got a better reputation and improved his own school habits. My advice to teachers is to take more time out to spend with each student instead of worrying about sticking to schedule...."

A Peer Teaching Program

"What's the purpose of this peer teaching program?" I asked Wells, the professional mathematician who trains peer teachers at Madison.

"We want to improve a kid's understanding of mathematics," he said. "And that happens for both the peer teacher and the students. But more important, we want to bolster children's confidence in dealing with academic subjects and increase their involvement in, and their responsibility for, their own education.

In this sense, we feel we are making a contribution to the community."

"How does the program work?"

"Our methods of selection and training make the program successful," Wells went on. "First, we look for students who are low achievers and poorly motivated, potential drop-outs (many of them are discipline problems), some of them are even classified as educationally handicapped. But they must have high learning potential and strong personalities.

"In the beginning of the school year, we ask for candidates and recommendations from teachers, principals, and administrators. I interview as many as 75 and then I choose a class of 30. I meet with them for two weeks every day, before and after school, in a special class where they learn material they would teach if they're chosen to be peer teachers. They also see my techniques. I watch to see how fast they can learn. At the same time, during the regular school period, I take them out of class and interview them. In these interviews - which can include anywhere from two to ten students - they have a chance to do practice teaching on each other. We end up with eight peer teachers. I might say that more and more, we are training the peer teachers to train their 7th grade students to teach. Last year, we had about fifteen 7th graders teaching their own class, with the supporting guidance of the older peer teachers."

"Will this work in elementary schools?"

"I have trained 4th graders to teach other 4th graders for a shorter period of time. We also have 9th graders teaching 9th graders. But teaching kids your own age is a lot harder. It takes a very strong person because your own age group will heckle and learn faster than a younger age group. We also have peer teachers teaching college juniors and seniors who are preparing to be teachers. They're teaching math to these prospective teachers. They're nervous at first, but they relax when they control the situation. This happens because of their method of teaching. All of it is based on leading questions. The college juniors and seniors haven't been exposed to this approach for years - professors don't ask kids questions in college - and the college kids feel, 'don't call on me.' The peer teacher soon realizes this, and becomes confident very quickly. By showing kids from the university some successful high school students, the prospective teachers get a better idea of the career they're entering. And the

peer teachers acquire new confidence and more experience."

"Let's talk about peer teaching at Madison."

"The 9th grade peer teachers teach for a whole year. They teach a class twice a week and the regular teacher teaches it the other three days. They teach one hour a day and are paid $3.00 an hour. They assume the normal responsibilities of the teacher. This means disciplining students, preparing lessons, giving homework, testing and grading."

"Are the regular teachers present when they teach?"

"At first we thought the peer teacher would have more authority if the regular teacher wasn't there. Then we realized that when students see the peer teacher and the regular teacher cooperating on discipline and program, the peer teacher is validated. So we try to encourage the regular teachers to sit in and participate. One of our teachers did that and asked stimulating questions. So the peer teacher called on her and asked her to come to the board. Other teachers prefer not to be involved and like to use the time to catch up on paper work. We don't like that, but all we can do is hope they attend peer teaching classes. That's an achievement in itself."

"Why should kids respect student teachers just two years older?"

"I have only two pieces of evidence. One, I've seen it. And two, I remember my own experience in school. When you are in 7th grade, a two-year difference in age is much more impressive than it is later on. So 9th graders are looked upon with great respect."

"What do you tell parents who may say they want their kids taught by adult teachers, not student teachers?"

"The first thing is, the adult teachers are still teaching - three times a week. Second, there are the results. Tests show that the kids being taught by peer teachers do better than those taught by adult teachers. You see, the peer teacher provides the students with a successful peer-model. They say to themselves, that could be me up there. This makes them more willing to do something for the peer teacher than the regular teacher. The peer teacher can get things done by generating enthusiasm rather than imposing discipline."

"Do you think you could get these kids to teach for nothing - without paying them?"

"Yes, many have taught without pay. But we're talking about a situation where the kids don't have a lot of money. Six dollars can be a highly motivating

force. We consider it a job. What we're paying them for is not only the time they put in during school hours but the time outside of those hours. At one junior high school, the peer teachers came to school early every day from September to February for their training and preparation. You see, we don't want to just recruit teachers, we want to affect the community. The greatest example is Melvin Jermon."

"Brian Richardson mentioned him."

The Story of Melvin Jermon

"Melvin was a troublemaker with a tough family background. The school administration was very concerned about him. They thought that one thing they could do was give him a little more responsibility in the operation of the school, so he became an office assistant.

"Anyway, I asked for some peer teaching candidates. I wanted to look at some kids who were good at math and some kids who were discipline problems. And I was looking for kids with strong personalities. Well, some of the tough guys have no personality - they're too much into themselves. I talked to Melvin, who wasn't very good in math. I had heard that he was the leader of a gang and that he didn't go to class very much. Talking with him, I found him to be a lovely guy. I couldn't understand how he could be a troublemaker, though I could see that if he got crossed, he'd be a terror.

"Well, I chose him. He was surprised; he'd felt he didn't have a chance. After all, his grades were lousy and he was absent most of the time from the candidate classes. But early on, I saw he was a natural, that he could take over a class. He's beautiful. I remember his first class. He came in smiling. The kids - 7th graders - teased him a little. He smiled. Somebody said, 'You think you a teacher or something?' He then got a terribly serious expression and said, 'I came here with something to teach and I hope you will be interested in hearing it; and I hope we get along.' And he started smiling again and went on to teach an incredibly excellent class.

"What I didn't know was that Melvin was changing outside of class. By the end of the year he wasn't going around in the halls with his gang, he was telling students to go to class. Instead of being a negative influence, he was doing something to develop himself and them. He will be in the 10th grade next year. If we get money, we'd like him either to train 9th graders at Madison - in other words, he and others like him could take

over our jobs - or teach math to 6th graders."

That is how I "met" Melvin Jermon.

* * * *

Once upon a time, we thought we believed in integrated education. A high court decision in the mid-50's and scores of federal laws in the 60's seemed evidence that our conviction, albeit a bit late, was taking root. We had moved in that direction because we felt it was right and because we felt it would actually benefit a child's learning capacity. The push for integrated education in this country came largely from white political liberals. Not surprisingly, when the movement for integrated education died in the late 60's so did much of the energies of American liberals, who were under attack from the Nixon opportunists on the right, and white radicals and the black power people on the left. They were also under their own fire: guilt because they had failed or because they had never really believed in their own faith, and anger toward the angry blacks and angry radicals who did not appear to appreciate almost forty years of liberal legislation. Guilt and anger took their toll. Today, I know very few people who would describe themselves - at least to strangers - as liberals. The word evokes a naive faith in the public weal that seems shredded by the warfare among snarling interest groups.

Portrait of a Liberal

Mary Strauss has a handsome, open face. Born and raised in Minneapolis, she is Radcliffe '49, the wife of a doctor and - so she describes herself - "a liberal Democrat." The Strausses live in a mostly white, upper-middle class, Republican area of Oakland. A little further up the hill, in a different school district, people have to choose between sending their children to predominantly black or predominantly white schools. "Thank God we don't have that choice," Mrs. Strauss says.

But the Strausses, because of a comfortable income, do have an option. Half of their neighbors let their children go to the largely black district schools, Howard Elementary and King Junior High; the other half send them to parochial schools. The three Strauss children go to the public schools - their two girls are at Howard and their boy has just begun at King. The Strauss children are in the public schools because of their mother's faith. "I believe in public schools and I also care about quality integrated education," she says haltingly as if she has never

had to explain her commitments to a stranger.

Faith in the public schools? As we approached Howard Elementary School, which sits quizzically on top of a lonely hill, I noticed a fishing boat in front of the school. "It's called Holliday's Ark after Larry Holliday, the principal," Mrs. Strauss explained. "He wanted to try to enliven the playground. The boat's been a wonderful joy to the children, but in the few months it's been here it's had to be rebuilt four or five times because of vandalism."

Faith in integration? One of the Master Plan task forces looking into the feasibility of a desegregation plan in Oakland decided, as its black chairwoman told me impatiently, that "no segment in Oakland is crying for desegregation as a means of achieving quality education." Quality education, she made clear, is attainable without desegregation.

If Mary Strauss hears these voices, she isn't affected by them. In the car on the way to Howard, we talked about her involvement with Howard's Master Plan site committee.

"Here there is not the history of problems that you have in the East," she said. "There was also the positive force of Dr. Foster. He came in and said there was going to be community involvement - that is all. He had a charismatic effect on everyone. Oh, there were critics. But we were happy to have him in the saddle. He said that rich people always had community control of their schools because they could get in there and say what they wanted. He said that teachers and principals were public servants and that the community had to get them back to that role."

"Are your principal and teachers really <u>for</u> parent involvement?"

"I know the principal, Larry Holliday, is. The teachers are reluctant. Parents are still not invited to faculty meetings. In some schools, it's a routine matter for parents to have representatives at these meetings. In response to pressure, the teachers at Howard have created a monthly meeting called the Faculty Meeting of the Whole, where parents are invited to bring in problems. Not many parents go but some are always there."

"Are they resisting curriculum changes?"

"A little while ago, there was a good series on educational television about a new technique in teaching - it comes out of Glasser's <u>Schools Without Failure</u>. The technique calls for arranging the students in a circle and asking them to solve a problem as a

group in the presence of an unjudging adult. The series offered academic and salary credits to teachers who would adopt the program. Well, six or seven of our teachers met every Tuesday afternoon to watch the program and then discuss it afterwards. But the program never really got off the ground at Howard. The teachers, particularly those who got their training years ago, resisted the idea of putting the students' desks in a circle."

As we climbed the hill, we talked about Howard. Fifteen years ago it was in a white area and was largely white. It is now in a black area and has a 75 percent black student population. One of Mary Strauss's girls is in the 2nd grade, the other in the 5th.

"Are your children getting a good education there?"

"I think so. But they have aspirations - the same expectations for themselves as the teachers have for them - and the teachers are mainly white. They're able kids...obedient. They are doing okay. Maybe if they were marginal students, I would not feel secure about keeping them in a school where we are constantly striving for quality rather than confident we have it.

"Your boy is beginning junior high, is he not?"

"Yes. Many people say it's terrible. I have some fears. Junior high is a terribly difficult time for a child and I have a very sensitive loner. But I have a lot of friends, black and white, whose kids are going to King and whom I've known for years. I figure, because my boy's gone to the largely black Howard and has learned how not to be hassled - I figure that will help him. He has no enemies but he has no close friends yet. But I believe in the public schools and also care about integrated education. We're going to stand ready to help him with any problems."

"Why are you going to stick it out?"

"Dr. Foster said that at least in the West there was still a chance for public schools. They have changed racially in Oakland but I don't feel the quality has declined. I know that in the East, people with educational and cultural concerns have abdicated from the public schools - in New York, Washington, Philadelphia. But this hasn't happened yet in the West." She paused, troubled. "Well, yes. In San Francisco, they've left the schools and here, too, to a certain degree.... I wish I had had time to think about your questions."

At last, we reached the top of the hill, from which Howard looked forlornly

into the misty distance. It's a modern, attractive building whose only lack is grass; its playgrounds are paved, reflecting the architectural mentality that typifies so many American schools. I saw "Holliday's Ark" and then walked to the back of the school, where an unusual class was in session. With Master Plan fund money, the school had sponsored an ecology course for children over the summer. They had started a garden in the spring and today was the last day of class.

The class was directed by a University of California student. "The idea was Mr. Holliday's," she said. "We started the garden in an area where not even a weed was growing. During the school year, there was only time for the construction of the garden, not for showing the growth of the plants to the kids. Many of the children had never before seen vegetables growing. Now they have a different attitude toward the environment. They show some respect. They call it soil and they don't throw it around much. They've learned that directly or indirectly all their food comes from plants."

I watched as the children meandered up and down the rows of ripened vegetables and fully grown plants. They were a mixture of whites, blacks, Chicanos, and Orientals. As I watched them play, I had another question for Mary Strauss.

"I'm meeting with the president of the Oakland Teachers Association later on. What would you ask him?"

"I think the number one problem is how to get rid of the dead wood, how to inspire teachers so that they will, in turn, inspire kids."

We talked more about her involvement with the school. It had begun seven years before when her boy started kindergarten at Howard. "I got my start, as Ann Sprague did, with the League of Women Voters. They're sticking to the public schools. Parents who haven't been involved with such organizations may have more fears coming into schools that have problems. Many educated families don't even consider living in Oakland because they don't know how to cope with the racial and cultural changes."

Cries of surprise and disappointment came from the students in the garden. One of the large sunflowers they had patiently tended was missing.

"We've had a lot of vandalism," the teacher explained. "Somehow kids crawl under the fence we built. This sunflower took four months to grow. They will pull up cabbage plants and

then put them back in the ground as if they don't want us to know about it. It's very strange. I'm now leaving them notes, telling them that the plants can't grow that way."

We talked about the teachers' response to the ecology garden.

"It was an innovative project and the teachers are very traditional," she said. "They didn't value the project. I didn't know how to get them involved. Teachers shy away from this sort of thing. I think it is going to be a battle to get the teachers here and persuade them to get their hands dirty. They don't feel it's educational."

"Teachers also get hung up on the time it takes to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic," Mrs. Strauss said, "and forget that the garden itself could be a wonderful teaching tool in all these subjects."

I said goodbye to the teacher and the children and put one more question to Mrs. Strauss.

"You spend about thirty hours a week working in the school as a volunteer. Are your children better off because of your activities?"

"My children would be better off if I were home more and had more free time - listening-time for them. Of course, some of the programs are of benefit to them." Once again, she halted to make something clear. "My commitment is to quality integrated education in Oakland. Luckily my children are in a school where I can put this conviction to work. Why? It is the real world. People who move to the suburbs are postponing for another generation the opportunity for their children to rub shoulders with everybody."

* * * *

I did not think again of Mary Strauss that day. She, however, had thought of me - of my questions. That evening, I got a call at my motel.

"You wanted to know what will happen in the future in Oakland and why I'm an optimist," she said in her halting, soft voice.

And so she told me. First, she said, the younger parents, white and black, don't care about racial differences. Second, organizations like the League of Women Voters will continue to attract young women to help the cause of good schools and good government. Third, Oakland schools may become almost totally black but they will be very good. The younger black parents are learning how to ask for quality education; they know more about us than we know about them. And fourth, we are different from the East. We don't have the depth of slums. There

is more hope in California, it's easier to live physically and psychologically. Finally, we will succeed because we must succeed. We are building a foundation for a good society. Quality leadership is essential to our survival and it's waiting to be developed. There are enough of us who care enough to make sure it works. You've got to believe you're going to make this. Schools, housing - the answers to these problems will determine the flow of the people back to the city. We just can't sign off from the human race.

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